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The Soviet Union and Conference Diplomacy. A Study
of Soviet attitudes and policy towards International
Conferences in the period 1933-1939.

P.L.S. Condren, B.A.

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
the University of Glasgow.

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Contents

Summary.	iii - v
Acknowledgements.	vi
Preface.	vii
Chapter I. Soviet Russia and International Conferences, 1917-1933.	1 - 33
Chapter II. Soviet attitudes and reactions to the Four Power Pact, 1933.	34 - 79
Chapter III. The Soviet decision to join the League of Nations, 1933-1934, and Soviet reactions to the Stresa Conference, 1935.	80 - 116
Chapter IV. The Soviet Union and the Montreux Conference, 1936.	117 - 154
Chapter V. Soviet attitudes and policy towards the Committee for Non-Intervention in Spanish Affairs, July 1936 - August 1937.	155 - 190
Chapter VI. The Soviet Union, the Nyon Conference and the Non-Intervention Committee, September 1937 - March 1939.	191 - 219
Chapter VII. The Soviet Union and the Brussels Conference, November 1937.	220 - 246
Chapter VIII. The international conference as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy, March 1938 - March 1939.	247 - 306
Conclusion.	307 - 315
Appendices.	316 - 337
Bibliography.	338 - 350

Summary.

After a brief discussion of the aims and nature of Soviet foreign policy, the first chapter describes and analyses Russian attitudes and policy towards international conferences in the period, 1917-1933. This study of the Soviet approach to the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, the Genoa, Hague and Lausanne Conferences, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, Disarmament, and the League of Nations, sets the succeeding chapters in their historical context.

The next two chapters are devoted to a detailed examination of the reorientation of Moscow's foreign policy and the effects this had on subsequent Soviet attitudes to all international conferences, committees or groupings. Against a background of deteriorating German-Soviet relations came the Four Power Pact of 1933, an attempt to solve Europe's problems by means of a Great Power directorate. The USSR's hostility at its exclusion from European affairs, led to the initiation of the prolonged Franco-Soviet negotiations which eventually resulted in Soviet membership of the League of Nations, and the signing of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact. Yet despite Moscow's espousal of collective security, the USSR was excluded from the Stresa Conference of 1935, when Britain, France and Italy met to discuss European security problems.

The Montreux Straits Conference of 1936, marked the high point of Soviet Conference Diplomacy. With the support of the French and Roumanians, and by exerting pressure on the Turks, the Soviet Union was able to force concessions from a Britain reluctant to countenance the breakdown of the Conference. The new Straits Convention gave the USSR important strategic

advantages with which to complement its propaganda success as champion of the smaller states and of collective security.

The Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936 and continued until the end of March 1939. Throughout this period the Soviet Union followed the dual policies of supplying arms to the Spanish Republic while remaining a member of the Non-Intervention Committee. The increasing isolation of the USSR was emphasised by Soviet behaviour within the Committee, where Maisky repeatedly contested various issues but only up to a point short of causing the breakdown of the Committee. The success of the Nyon Conference of September 1937, in dealing with Mussolini's clandestine submarine campaign, temporarily led Moscow to believe that Britain and France were about to adopt a firmer position. However, the Soviet Government was to be disappointed, and this section closes with an analysis of Soviet intentions and tactics at the London Committee and Nyon Conference, and an appraisal of the implications of the Western attitude for the policy of collective security.

The Brussels Conference on the Far East which was held in November 1937, further demonstrated Western weakness in the face of open Japanese aggression against China. Not only was the Conference a total failure, but the Soviet delegation was largely ignored during the proceedings. This was the last international conference in which the Soviet Union participated before the outbreak of war.

Between the Austrian Anschluss and the Munich Agreement of September 30th 1938, the Soviet Government made four proposals for the calling of an international conference. Each was either rejected or ignored by Britain and France. Munich did not, however, put an end to such Soviet attempts, for after Germany's annexation of Czechoslovakia, Britain asked

Moscow for its reactions in the event of a German threat to Roumania. Litvinov's suggestion of an international conference was countered by a British proposal for a Four Power declaration. Polish intransigence led to the abandonment of this scheme, and instead Britain and France gave a guarantee to Poland without prior consultation with the USSR.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the main trends of Soviet Conference Diplomacy in this period, and an assessment of the part international conferences played in Soviet foreign policy with particular reference to the policy of collective security.

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Preface

For the purposes of this study, the term Conference Diplomacy has been widened to include, not only diplomacy during a particular conference, but all diplomatic activity concerned with international conferences, committees and groupings. Thus Moscow's exclusion from such assemblies assumes as much importance as its participation. This applies in particular to the case of the negotiations for the Four Power Pact, which despite certain similarities to an international conference, cannot strictly be regarded as such, yet to ignore Soviet reactions to the Pact would be to seriously distort the interpretation of subsequent events. Similarly no study of Soviet attitudes towards international conferences could be undertaken without an understanding of Moscow's reasons for becoming a member of the League of Nations in 1934.

One difficulty arising from the examination of just one aspect of Soviet foreign policy, is the creation of the correct balance between the subject and its context, without either totally excluding the background of each episode, or becoming involved in the discussion of interesting, if irrelevant, wider issues. This need to restrict the focus is especially necessary in those chapters involving the Spanish Civil War and the Munich Agreement, about both of which much has been written elsewhere. For these same reasons it has been decided to conclude with the final rejection of Moscow's last proposal for the calling of an international conference, on March 18th 1939, rather than to embark upon the complex tripartite negotiations of the summer of 1939.

1917 - 1933

The study of a single aspect of Soviet foreign policy cannot be undertaken in isolation from two basic factors. Firstly, the particular international situation prevailing at a given time, and secondly, the Soviet foreign policy "line", or ideological view of the situation.

The period 1933 to 1939, according to Soviet periodisation, is seen as that of the struggle of the Soviet Union against Fascist aggression by means of a system of collective security. This period in turn is part of that of the, "Building of Socialism and the preparation of a New War by the Imperialist Powers, 1929 - 1939."¹ The international conferences in which the Soviet Union participated, in the years 1933 to 1939, formed an integral part of Moscow's policy of collective security, while those gatherings from which Russia was excluded, invariably had a profound effect on this policy. The successes and the failures of Soviet Conference Diplomacy reflected, to a considerable degree, the fate of collective security in the six years prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.

This study of Soviet attitudes and policy towards international conferences will thus primarily be concerned with an assessment of the part which they played in Russian foreign policy as a whole, an evaluation of the significance

¹ M.E. Airapetyan, "The Periodisation of the History of Soviet Foreign Policy", International Affairs, (Moscow, 1958), No.2, p.67. All Soviet works on the foreign policy of the inter-war period use a substantially similar periodisation scheme.

or each individual conference as an implement of this policy, and an analysis of the major trends and developments of Soviet Conference Diplomacy from the Russian exclusion from the Four Power Pact of 1933, to Moscow's last call for the assembly of an international conference on March 18th, 1939.

A brief assessment of the principal aims of Soviet policy will enable the conferences in question to be placed in their context though a prolonged discussion of the vexed question of the part played by ideology² in Russian international relations, would be out of place. It does, however, seem clear that there has often been a significant divergence between the utterances of Soviet leaders, and their actions. The perpetual references in all Soviet works on foreign policy, to the inexhaustible ideological fund of Marxism - Leninism, seem to be little more than attempts to lend authority to a pragmatism as fundamental as any found in the West. Marxism - Leninism has at least given Soviet historians a means of proving, albeit retrospectively, that "history ran on the rails according to an infallible plan",³ though it seems doubtful whether Soviet

² In his report to the XVII Party Congress, on January 6th, 1934, Stalin made the point that the ideological differences between the Soviet Union and Fascist Italy had "not prevented the USSR from establishing the best relations with that country." J.V. Stalin, "Works", (Moscow, 1955), Vol. 13, pp. 308-309. However, the Kremlin's initial assessment of National-Socialism in Germany seems to have been somewhat influenced by ideological wishful thinking. See, W. Laqueur, "Russia and Germany", (London, 1965), pp. 196-251.

³ A. Koestler, "Darkness at Noon", (New York, 1946), p. 27. An editorial in *Voprosy Istorii* gives the following appraisal of the role of history in the USSR:

"The study of history has never been mere curiosity, a withdrawal into the past for the sake of the past.... Historical science has been and remains a class, a party history.... Our ideological opponents contend that the Party spirit of Soviet historiography is incompatible with objective scientific research.... the great force of Marxist - Leninist doctrine is that it places in the researcher's hands the only correct and scientific creative method of objective, comprehensive study of social phenomena and processes." *Voprosy Istorii*, (Moscow, 1960), No. 8, pp. 3-19. See N.W. Heer, "Politics and History in the Soviet Union", (Cambridge, Mass, 1971).

leaders found international relations as predictable as they might have wished.

Ivan Mikhailovich Maisky, Soviet Ambassador to Britain from 1932 to 1943, gave in 1936, one of many similar descriptions of the aims and principles of his country's foreign policy. These principles were, he said, firstly, the self-determination of nations, and secondly, peace.⁴

This statement was merely one of innumerable such statements emanating from Soviet and left-wing sources⁵ during the inter-war period. It creates the picture of a peace-loving nation, striving to maintain world peace. On one level this was true. The Soviet Government had consistently advocated peace and disarmament ever since 1917, but to accept this interpretation at face value would be to ignore the basic nature of Soviet foreign policy, its flexibility:

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to refuse beforehand to manoeuvre, to utilise the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among

⁴ I.M. Maisky, "Soviet Foreign Policy", Speech to the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee, (London, 1936), p.5. Maisky later wrote, as a testimonial to his orthodoxy, that his moods, thoughts and feelings "truthfully reflected what the Soviet people, the Soviet State, the Soviet Government were thinking and feeling. My psychology was a miniature photographic reproduction of the psychology of the Soviet whole...." I.M. Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?" (London, 1964), pp.95-96.

⁵ For example, Henri Barbusse, the French novelist wrote in 1930: "From its first decree "On Peace"... to its adherence to the Kellogg Pact, the Soviet Government has struggled for peace with remarkable persistence and inexhaustible energy, raising its voice for immediate universal and complete disarmament, and acting as initiators in the conclusion of mutual non-aggression and neutrality pacts." H. Barbusse, "The Soviet Union and Peace", (London, 1930), p.1.

one's enemies, to refuse to temporise and compromise with possible (even though transient, unstable vacillating and conditional) allies - is this not ridiculous in the extreme?⁶

This flexibility meant, in the first instance, that with the non-appearance of World Revolution, Soviet tactics had to be changed - an application of Lenin's policy at Brest - Litovsk to the broader international situation. Thus, in the period 1920 to 1941, the fundamental task of Soviet foreign policy was,

to pursue a peace policy and maintain and consolidate the world's first workers' state, to gain the most favourable international conditions for the building of a socialist society in our country, and for transforming the USSR into a mighty industrial power capable of withstanding imperialist attacks.⁷

This then was the principal reason for the USSR's espousal of the cause of peace. Maisky gives the usual Soviet rider to such explanations; "We hate and detest war as wanton cruelty and destruction of humanity, the main burden of which falls on the common people."⁸ While it is true that Moscow followed, publicly at least, a policy based on the promotion of peace and disarmament, until 1939, after this date, war and occupation were seen as the best guarantee of Soviet security.⁹

⁶ V.I. Lenin, "Left-wing Communism - an infantile disorder", "Selected Works", Vol.X, (Moscow, 1938), p.111.

⁷ Airapetyan, "The Periodisation of the History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.65.

⁸ Maisky, "Soviet Foreign Policy", p.13. Given Lenin's justification for the linking of foreign and domestic policy, (V.I.Lenin, "Collected Works" (Moscow,1964) Vol.23,p.43 and Vol.25, p.85.) the slaughter of the purges during the late 1930s would seem to indicate that concern for humanity was not the most striking feature of Soviet domestic or foreign policy. For an estimate of the casualty figures resulting from the Great Purge, see, Robert Conquest, "The Great Terror", (London, 1971), Appendix A, pp.699-713.

⁹ For example, the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States, Poland and Bessarabia, and the war against Finland.

The proletarian state of which Nikolai Bukharin¹⁰ wrote with such certainty in 1936, was already being transformed into the monolithic organisation which, under Stalin, was responsible for the destruction of so many of its own citizens, Bukharin included. He stated,

it follows that not only from the economic but also from the purely political standpoint - not only from the standpoint of the USSR proper, but also from that of the ultimate world-wide victory of socialism - it is utterly senseless to think of a policy of war being adopted by the proletarian state.¹¹

The Soviet attitude to peace and war, is to see them as two closely linked manifestations of politics, the difference between them being one of method only. "From the Communist point of view, revolution is the central aim of all political action, and it can, under various circumstances, be pursued by both methods."¹² The security of the Soviet Union had, by 1933, taken priority over revolution as the principal aim of Soviet foreign policy. It would perhaps be naive to suppose that the leadership of a totalitarian state would rule out the use of certain means of attaining their objectives, merely because those means conflict with their own previous statements. This is all the more likely when the leadership "has a monopoly of the right of interpretation of the official ideology, and a monopoly of control over the communications network."¹³ In the case of the Soviet Union, the far reaching

¹⁰ N.I.Bukharin, leading Communist intellectual, ex-President of Comintern, ex-Editor of Izvestia, shot 1938.

¹¹ N.I.Bukharin, "Imperialism and Communism", Foreign Affairs, (New York, 1936), No.3. p.574.

¹² J.Librach, "The Rise of the Soviet Empire", (London, 1965), p.16. See also, T.A.Taracouzio, "War and Peace in Soviet Diplomacy", (New York, 1940). "If realism is to be accepted as the only criterion of international relations, then the elusiveness of the Soviet interpretation of war and peace must be borne in mind, and the Kremlin's offerings of peace and friendship, appraised accordingly." Ibid. p.297.

¹³ F.C.Barghoorn, "Soviet Foreign Propaganda", (Princeton, 1964) p.23.

changes which took place under the rule of Stalin, left intact the outward trappings of the world's first proletarian state, while its proclamations of Marxist - Leninist orthodoxy, if anything, grew in volume, the former Stalin's hold on the USSR became.

It is against this background that Soviet Conference Diplomacy, as one facet of Russian foreign policy, should be seen.

Conference Diplomacy¹⁴ was not new, even in 1917, but the wartime experience of the Entente, whose inter-allied conferences had proved their efficiency, made Western statesmen turn towards the concept of international conferences as the panacea for the world's post-war problems. The main advantage which international conferences offer over normal diplomatic relations is that, ideally it assembles policy-makers, or their close representatives, around one table, thus by-passing many diplomatic processes and enabling decisions to be taken relatively swiftly. The disadvantage of such a system is that the failure of an international conference is automatically magnified by virtue of the international attention focussed upon it. International conferences were particularly attractive to the newly founded Soviet state, which saw in them the opportunity both to break its isolation and to use such occasions for propaganda purposes.

The international conferences in which Soviet Russia participated, both before and during "the struggle to transform the Breathing Space into a period of co-existence, 1921-1929",¹⁵

¹⁴ See, H. Nicolson, "Diplomacy", (London, 1939), pp.154-159. See also, J. Duroselle, "Changes in Diplomacy since Versailles", in B. Porter, ed., "The Aberystwyth Papers-International Politics 1919-1969", (London, 1972), pp.108-112.

¹⁵ Airapetyan, "The Periodization of the History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.66.

revealed for the first time, several features which were to characterise Moscow's Conference Diplomacy between 1933 and 1939.

The Decree on Peace,¹⁶ issued by the Bolsheviks on November 8th, 1917, called for a just and democratic peace without annexations or indemnities, and stated that they were prepared to commence immediate negotiations for an armistice. This, plus the sensational publication of the Tsarist secret treaties and the repudiation of all legal ties with other nations made by the Tsarist Government, was the first foreign policy act of the Bolshevik Government, "a new word in the history of international relations",¹⁷ by which the Bolsheviks demonstrated their contempt for traditional diplomacy. This was tantamount to a complete withdrawal from the European diplomatic system:

The abolition of secret diplomacy is the primary condition for an honest, popular, truly democratic foreign policy....The workers' and peasants' Government abolishes secret diplomacy and its intrigues, codes and lies.¹⁸

In future, diplomacy would be carried on "absolutely openly before the entire people",¹⁹ and in fact the Bolshevik leaders expected that international diplomacy, as such, would disappear with the coming of the World Revolution.²⁰

¹⁶ For the text of this decree, see, J.Degras, "Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy", (London, 1951) Vol.I, pp.1-3. (Hereinafter: Degras).

¹⁷ A.A.Gromyko, et al. eds., "Istoriya diplomatii", (Moscow, 1965), Vol.III, p.55.

¹⁸ Degras, Vol.I, pp.8-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

²⁰ As Trotsky said, "I will issue some revolutionary proclamations to the peoples and then close up the joint." Lenin too, seemed somewhat surprised at the concept of Bolshevik diplomacy. "What, are we going to have foreign relations?" L.Trotsky, "Mein Leben", (Berlin, 1930) p.327, quoted in T.H.von Laue. "Soviet Diplomacy: G.V.Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930", G.A.Craig and F.Gilbert, eds., "The Diplomats", (Princeton, 1953), p.235.

However, in the interim more practical steps had to be taken to ensure the survival of the newly founded state:

The Leninist foreign policy of the CPSU and the Soviet state, organically linked to domestic policy, was a constituent part of the strategy and tactics of the party. The international policy of the Soviet state protected the interests of the workers of the USSR in the world arena, guaranteeing the most favourable foreign conditions for socialist and communist construction.²¹

These tactics were put to the test during the negotiations which took place between the representatives of the new Soviet state and those of the victorious Central Powers, at Brest - Litovsk²² from December 1917 to March 1918. This was thus the occasion of the first appearance of the Bolsheviks on the international stage.

Not unexpectedly, as representatives of a revolutionary Government, the behaviour of the Bolshevik delegation tended to be somewhat unusual²³ by the accepted standards of international diplomacy. The most significant feature of the Bolsheviks conduct was their use of the negotiations as an opportunity and as a platform for the direction of propaganda not only at the troops of the Central Powers, but at the proletariat of the whole world. Similarly, the initial aim of the Soviet delegation was to consume as much time as possible in fruitless discussion; so that the long-awaited proletarian revolution, stimulated by their flood of propaganda, would arise

²¹ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol. III, p.59.

²² For the standard account of these negotiations, see, J.W.Wheeler-Bennett, "Brest-Litovsk; the forgotten Peace" (London, 1963). For a Soviet account, see, A.A.Akhtamzyan, Iz istorii peregovorakh v Brest-Litovske, 1918 g., Voprosy Istarii, 1966, No.11. See also V.I.Lenin, "Lenin i Brestskii mir; stati i rechi", (Moscow, 1924.), and G.L. Nikol'nikov, "Vydayushchayasya pobeda leninskoi strategii i taktiki" (Moscow, 1968).

²³ The Bolshevik delegation took with them to Brest-Litovsk, a token soldier, sailor, worker and a somewhat bewildered peasant. Wheeler-Bennett, "Brest-Litovsk: the forgotten Peace", pp.85-86.

and destroy Imperialism. As Trotsky stated, "We began peace negotiations in the hope of arousing the workmen's parties of Germany and Austria - Hungary as well as those of the Entente countries."²⁴ The Bolsheviks refused both to observe the formalities of the "old diplomacy", and to negotiate in the accepted manner, their speeches being directed over the heads of Hoffmann,²⁵ Kühlmann²⁶ and Czernin²⁷ at the working classes of the world.

That the Central Powers tolerated this bizarre behaviour for as long as they did, was a measure of the importance they attached to achieving peace on their Eastern Front. After some months of negotiation which led nowhere, Trotsky carried his lack of concern for the traditional methods of diplomacy almost too far, when he announced to the astonished Germans, "We shall stop the war, but we shall not sign the peace."²⁸ The result was that the Bolsheviks were forced to sign a considerably more severe treaty in order to halt the forces of the Central Powers which had resumed their advance against negligible Russian opposition.

²⁴ L.Trotsky, "Lenin", (London, 1925), p.128. Lev Davidovich Trotsky, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs until February 1918.

²⁵ Major-General Max Hoffmann, Head of the German delegation.

²⁶ Baron Richard von Kühlmann, German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

²⁷ Count Ottokar Czernin, Austrian Foreign Minister.

²⁸ This was to avoid signing a treaty which recognised the loss of Poland, Lithuania, Courland, the Ukraine and Georgia, among other areas. Trotsky denounced this German interpretation of "self-determination" in a letter to Lenin, calling the Governments of these lost territories "fictitious". Wheeler-Bennett, "Brest-Litovsk: the forgotten Peace", pp.185-186. The subsequent Soviet actions in the Ukraine and Georgia areas showed what Trotsky meant by "self-determination". W.Wagner, "The Partitioning of Europe", (Stuttgart, 1959), pp.17-23. See also Librach, "The Rise of the Soviet Empire", pp.13 and 43.

When the head of the Bolshevik delegation, Gregory Sokolnikov²⁹ signed the treaty, depriving Russia of enormous stretches of her most valuable territory,³⁰ he merely stated his intention of signing, without any discussion of the terms of the agreement.³¹ This conscious adoption of the martyr's role demonstrates the Bolshevik's almost histrionic flair for publicity when they occupied the world arena, and was an attitude which became a familiar feature of Soviet international relations. They created the perfect propaganda picture of the predatory Imperialists savagely dismembering their victim, a picture often used, but which in this instance was close to reality, though in future, it became increasingly less appropriate as the USSR grew stronger.

Lenin's attitude to the treaty³² also has some significance for subsequent Soviet international conduct. He said, "I don't mean to read it, and I don't mean to fulfill it, except in so far as I am forced."³³ Such frankness soon grew scarce, but the belief that an international agreement need not necessarily stand in the way of Soviet interests, was as important a precedent for Moscow's conduct of its international relations

²⁹ Sokolnikov had replaced Trotsky in February, 1918.

³⁰ For the text of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty see, S. Dernberg, et al. eds., "Sovetsko-Germanskije otnosheniya "Vol. I. 1917-1918. (Moscow, 1968), No. 34, pp. 75-81. (Hereinafter: SGO).

³¹ See, Degras, Vol. I, pp. 46-50.

³² The treaty was bitterly resented by many outside the Bolshevik party, and even by some Bolsheviks, but Lenin's decision to sign was "a classical example of Leninist strategy and tactics." Nikol'nikov, "Vydayushchayasya pobeda leninskoi strategii i taktiki" p. 371.

³³ W.C. White, "Lenin", (New York, 1936), p. 144. The treaty was however, ratified on March 15th, 1918. Degras, Vol. I, pp. 63-65.

as was the emphasis on the propaganda aspect of the Brest-Litovsk episode.

The 1920's were the years when Moscow's greatest problem in the international sphere was to secure the recognition or at least the acceptance of the RSFSR by the Western Powers.³⁴ Although diplomatic relations were eventually established during this period with every important state, except the USA, the initial hostility of the West to the Bolshevik regime did not completely disappear, but rather faded into a general reluctance to see Soviet Russia as a factor of any great significance in the reconstruction of post-war Europe.

Lenin was thus all the more anxious to take part in the Genoa Conference to which the RSFSR had been invited to send a delegation,³⁵ for Russia had been deliberately excluded from the first major post-war international conference. The Washington Conference (November 12th, 1921 - February 6th, 1922) had been convened to deal with Far Eastern questions and the limitation of naval armaments. On July 19th, 1921 the Soviet Government protested at its exclusion, stating that in the interests of peace, it considered it as a duty to participate in all international conferences aimed at the solution of questions involving the interests of Soviet Russia. "Nevertheless", ran the protest, "the very idea of disarmament can only seem to the Soviet Government as worthy of support."³⁶ The Soviet protest was ignored.

³⁴ For an account of the part played by the Russian question at the Peace Conference, see J.M. Thompson, "Russia, Bolshevism and the Versailles Peace", (Princeton, 1966).

³⁵ For the text of the Russian acceptance, see Degras, Vol. I. pp. 287-288.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 250. Chicherin's protest of November 2nd, 1921, can be found on p. 272.

The Genoa Conference seemed to offer Moscow a means of ending its isolation. Lenin was personally invited to Genoa but although he did not attend, he took the post of Chairman³⁷ as a mark of the importance he attached to the Conference. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Georgi Vassilievich Chicherin, was, however, to lead the Soviet delegation at Genoa. Chicherin wrote that Lenin took a close interest in,

all questions connected with the pending Genoa Conference. He wrote a number of memoranda on this question, and the general content of our speeches in Genoa was based on these memoranda.³⁸

The Cannes coexistence resolution,³⁹ made by the Entente Powers, seemed to offer at least "a good basis for a dialogue",⁴⁰ though Lenin and Chicherin can have been under few illusions as to the likely outcome of the Conference.

The draft decision on the main objectives of the Soviet delegation at Genoa, written by Lenin on February 24th, stressed that, while not compromising their political principles, the ideological position of the Soviet Government should be given less emphasis than normally, "because we have come to reach agreement with the pacifist section of the other (bourgeois) camp." The delegation was also instructed to make no reference to the inevitable bloody overthrow of the capitalist system "because this would merely play into the hands of the enemy." According to Lenin the principal aim of

³⁷ "On January 27th, the Soviet delegation to Genoa was chosen. V.I.Lenin was named President of the delegation, as deputy—G.V.Chicherin, with full presidential rights should obligations prevent the possibility of Lenin's attending the Conference. On the staff of the delegation were, L.B.Krassin, M.M.Litvinov, V.V.Vorovsky, Ya.E.Rudzutak and others." A.O.Chubar'yan, "V.I.Lenin i formulirovanie sovetskoi vneshnei politiki", (Moscow, 1972) p.228.

³⁸ G.V.Chicherin, "Stati i rechi", (Moscow, 1961) p.284. See also, Chubar'yan, pp. 230-238.

³⁹ The Allied Conference at Cannes, January 6th to 13th, was one of a series of abortive conferences held to deal with the problem of German reparations.

⁴⁰ Z.S.Sheinis, "V Genuie i Gaage", Novaya i Noveishaya Istoriia (Moscow, 1968), No.3. pp. 52-62.

the Soviet delegation was "to single out this (pacifist) wing from the rest of the bourgeois camp... and declare that from our standpoint not only a trade but also a political agreement with them is permissible and desirable."⁴¹

The official Soviet position as stated in a note to the Entente Governments on March 15th, 1922 was as follows:

The Soviet Government is going to the conference at Genoa with the steadfast purpose of joining the economic cooperation of all nations which give a reciprocal guarantee of the inviolability of their internal political and economic organization, in accordance with paragraph 1 of the Cannes resolutions.⁴²

Thus prepared, the Russian delegation under the leadership of Chicherin,⁴³ left for Genoa and the first open contacts with the Entente Powers since the revolution. This alone was a significant gain for the Soviet Government, in that it presented an opportunity for Russia to regain her place in the international community.

It became apparent, almost from the outset, that the negotiations at Genoa would prove to be sterile. France and Belgium adopted a hard line on the question of the Tsarist debts, and even British Premier Lloyd George's attempts at a

⁴¹ For this draft, see V.I. Lenin, "Polnoe sobranie sochinenii" (Moscow, 1964), Vol. 44, pp. 406-408. See also, M. Trush, "New Documents on Foreign Policy in Lenin's Complete Works", International Affairs, (Moscow, 1965), No. 3, p. 58. Chubar'yan, "V.I. Lenin i formulirovanie sovetskoi vneshnei politiki", pp. 243-246. B. Ponomarev, et al. eds., "History of Soviet Foreign Policy", (Moscow, 1969), p. 175.

⁴² Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR, (Hereinafter: DVP), Vol. V, (Moscow, 1961), No. 85, p. 155. Note from the Government of the RSFSR to the Governments of Great Britain, France and Italy, March 15th 1922. See also, Degras, Vol. I, p. 296.

⁴³ For an appraisal of Chicherin's activities at Genoa, see, I. Gorokhov, et al., "G.V. Chicherin - diplomat leninskoi shkoly", (Moscow, 1966), pp. 65-92. S. Zarnitsky and A. Sergeev, "Chicherin", (Moscow, 1966), pp. 145-179. Von Laue, "Soviet Diplomacy: G.V. Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930" in Craig and Gilbert, "The Diplomats", pp. 240-241, 268-269.

more conciliatory approach, failed to achieve any result.

The Entente Powers, though recognizing that, "Russia was the crucial problem in the task of European pacification and reconstruction",⁴⁴ seem to have quite misjudged the Soviet position. Western offers to reduce the amount required in the payment of pre-war debts, always broke down over the Soviet refusal to restore private property to its previous owners.⁴⁵

However, an event of major significance did take place during the Genoa Conference. On April 16th, the Soviet delegation "dealt the plans of the West a heavy and unexpected blow".⁴⁶ This event was the signing, at Rapallo, a suburb of Genoa, of a, "Soviet-German agreement on mutual recognition and the complete settlement of claims. The front of the European capitalist Powers, created against Russia, had been broken."⁴⁷

Negotiations between the two countries had been in progress since early 1921, and secret contacts had already been made in the diplomatic, commercial and military fields.⁴⁸ Various

⁴⁴ J.S.Mills, "The Genoa Conference", (London, n.d.), p.180. Mills gives a detailed contemporary account of the work of the Conference. For a stenographic record of the Conference, see, "Materiali Genuezkoi konferentsii", (Moscow, 1922).

⁴⁵ Lenin wrote on September 19th, 1922, "They do not want to give us a loan, unless we restore the property of the capitalists and landlords, but we cannot and will not do this". S.Yu.Vigodsky, "U istokov sovetskoi diplomatii", (Moscow, 1965), p.258.

⁴⁶ N.N.Lyubimov, "V Genue i vokrug nee", Izvestia, December 22nd, 1965. Lyubimov took part in the Anglo-Soviet talks at Lloyd George's residence, the Villa d'Albertis. See also, N.N. Lyubimov and N.A.Erlikh, "Genuezkaya Konferentsiya", (Moscow, 1963).

⁴⁷ K.B.Vinogradov, "David Lloyd George", (Moscow, 1970), p.346. For Vinogradov's view of the Genoa Conference and Lloyd George's part in it, see, pp. 335-348.

⁴⁸ See, J.Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", (London, 1962), pp. 144-148.

Soviet emissaries, including Karl Radek⁴⁹ and Nikolai Ivanovich Krestinsky,⁵⁰ had been active in Berlin, engaging in conversations with German officials and industrial leaders. Chicherin, prior to the opening of the Genoa talks, had indicated to the Germans his desire for the creation of a united German-Soviet front with which to confront the Entente, but nothing came of this until deadlock had been reached at Genoa. Whether Germany was using the threat of agreement with Russia as a lever on the Allies, as Soviet sources allege,⁵¹ or whether Russia was using Germany, is not clear.

The Treaty of Rapallo,⁵² by which the two states mutually waived their claims for compensation, established diplomatic and consular relations and laid the foundations for economic cooperation, was to be the principal pillar of Soviet foreign policy for the next ten years.⁵³ Rapallo was a remarkably successful diplomatic coup,⁵⁴ both for Russia and for Germany.

⁴⁹ Radek was head of the central European department of the Narkomindel. Earlier, he had been detained in Berlin's Moabit prison where he held levées for German industrialists and politicians. For this period of Russo-German relations, see, G.Freund, "Unholy Alliance, 1918-1926", (London, 1957), Chapters 2, 3 and 4. See also, W.Lerner, "Karl Radek", (Stanford, 1970), p.113.

⁵⁰ Krestinsky, RSFSR Plenipotentiary in Germany.

⁵¹ Ponomaryov, "History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.181.

⁵² For the text of the Rapallo Treaty, see, SGO, Vol.III, No.268, pp. 479-481.

⁵³ German-Soviet relations of the period 1918-1933 are covered by the following works. G.Freund, "Unholy Alliance". K.Rosenbaum, "Community of Fate: German-Soviet Relations, 1922-1928, (New York, 1965). L.H. Dyck, "Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, 1917-1933", (London,1966). See also,G.Hilger and A.G. Meyer, "The Incompatible Allies", (New York, 1953). Hilger was Counsellor of Legation dealing with economic affairs at the German Embassy in the Soviet Union from January, 1923. E.H. Carr gives general coverage of the whole period in his, "German-Soviet Relations", (London, 1952).

⁵⁴ "V.I. Lenin described this treaty as an example of the policy of peace and peaceful coexistence. It made a breach in the anti-Soviet policies of the West, and frustrated all the bourgeois plans, worked out on the eve of Genoa." Chubar'yan, "V.I. Lenin i formulirovanie sovetskoi vneshnei politiki", p.265.

It gave Russia the credits⁵⁵ and technology of a highly industrialized nation, and gave Germany markets, a source of raw materials and a means of evading Article 116 of the Treaty of Versailles, by which she would have been liable to pay war reparations to Russia.⁵⁶ The discomfiture which Rapallo caused the Allies, plus the open disagreement in their ranks led to the closure of the Genoa Conference at its third plenary meeting on May 19th 1922. Soviet sources attribute the failure at Genoa to Western intransigence. "The refusal of the ruling circles of Britain and France to change their position, condemned the conference to failure."⁵⁷ The Hague Conference, which met from June 15th to July 20th 1922, continued the discussions begun at Genoa. It too reached deadlock over the question of the return of private property. The Soviet delegation was prepared to make some concessions along these lines, but made it clear that "under no circumstances can there be any question of restoring the rights of former owners. The Soviet Government will never agree to this."⁵⁸ As neither side was prepared to change its position, the fate of the Hague Conference⁵⁹ was sealed.

55 See, Laqueur, "Russia and Germany", pp.130-132. Laqueur points out that trade with the USSR did not live up to German expectations.

56 For details of the importance of this point in inducing the Germans to sign the Rapallo agreement, see, Rosenbaum, "Community of Fate", pp.26-29.

57 Vinogradov, "David Lloyd George", p.347. There are many Soviet works on the Genoa and Hague Conferences, but while the depth of treatment varies, the interpretation remains constant. See, Vigodsky, "U istokov sovetskoi diplomatii", pp. 189-260. V.G.Trukhanovsky, ed., "V.I.Lenin i sovetskaya vneshnyaya politika", (Moscow, 1969) pp.124-129. N.Rubinstein, "Nakanune Genuezkoi konferentsii", *Istoriik Marxist*, (Moscow, 1941), No.2, pp.22-48. A.A.Akhtamzyan, "Genuezkaya konferentsiya i Rapallskii dogovor", *Voprosy Istarii*, (Moscow, 1972), No.5, pp.43-63. See also, L.Fischer, "The Soviets in World Affairs", (London, 1930) pp.318-372. Fisher's account is in part based on personal contacts with many leading Soviet figures of the time.

58 DVP, Vol.V, No.208, p.493. Press Bureau announcement from The Hague, July 11th 1922.

59 See, B.E.Shtein, "Gaagaskaya konferentsiya", (Moscow, 1922). Shtein was Secretary General to the Soviet delegation.

Thus ended Soviet Russia's first two international Conferences. None of the professed aims of either conference had been achieved, and instead a bilateral agreement with Germany had been concluded. Moscow could take some comfort from the fact that Russia had been invited to participate "and the fact that personal contact had been established between the chancelleries of Soviet Russia and the other Powers represented, paved the way for individual approaches to Moscow during the following two years."⁶⁰ The Genoa and Hague Conferences showed, according to Soviet commentaries, that two tendencies existed in the capitalist world. One was attempting to create a united front against Russia, while the other sought to establish contacts with her.⁶¹

More significant, were the Soviet attitudes and policy towards these two conferences. Barely four years after the November Peace Decree, the policy of the "breathing space" had led the Soviet Government to contradict, albeit secretly, its repeated calls for disarmament. Chicherin's opening speech⁶² at Genoa, in which the rather irrelevant mention of disarmament had so irritated Louis Barthou,⁶³ was made at a time when military talks between Russia and Germany were in progress.

⁶⁰ W.P. and Z.K.Coates, "A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations", (London, 1945), Vol.I, p.98. See also, V.A.Shishkin, "Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i strany Zapada v 1917-1923 gg." (Moscow, 1969). Shishkin's account is concerned principally with Soviet economic relations and gives details of the trade agreements signed with Italy and Czechoslovakia after Rapallo. See pp.319-332.

⁶¹ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", p.303.

⁶² DVP, Vol.V, No.109, p.201. Speech of the Deputy Chairman of the Soviet delegation G.V.Chicherin at the first plenary meeting of the Genoa Conference, April 10th, 1922. See also Chubar'yan, "V.I.Lenin i formulirovanie sovetskoi vneshnei politiki", pp.258-259.

⁶³ Barthou was the head of the French delegation at Genoa.

Although the Treaty of Rapallo itself contained no military clauses, the months which followed saw the signing of secret military agreements which led to the establishment on Soviet soil, of German training bases in the fields of aerial, armoured and chemical warfare,⁶⁴ against which Chicherin had inveighed at Genoa:

The Russian delegation intends during the subsequent work of the conference to propose a general reduction in armaments and to support any proposal having the aim of easing the burden of militarism, the reduction of the armies of all states and the adding to the rules of war the complete banning of its most barbaric forms, such as poisonous gases, aerial warfare etc., and especially the use of such means of destruction directed against the civilian population.⁶⁵

This dual approach, which made its first appearance at Genoa, was to prove typical of future Soviet diplomacy. While Russia negotiated with the West, she was simultaneously holding conversations with the Germans. While advocating peace and disarmament, Russia was arming herself and aiding German evasion of the military clauses of Versailles. While the Comintern endeavoured to spread world revolution through individual national Communist parties, the Soviet Government sought to establish trade agreements and non-aggression pacts with these same nations.

A further characteristic of the Soviet approach to the Genoa and Hague Conferences was that of the extraction of the maximum propaganda⁶⁶ value from such international gatherings.

⁶⁴ See, F.L.Carsten, "The Reichswehr and the Red Army, 1920-1933", Survey, No.44/45, pp.114-132. Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.148-163.

⁶⁵ DVP, Vol.V, No.108, p.193. Speech of the Soviet delegate at the first plenary meeting of the Genoa Conference, April 10th 1922.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of the role of propaganda in Soviet foreign affairs, see, Barghoorn, "Soviet Foreign Propaganda". Barghoorn's emphasis is on post-Second World War propaganda, but many of his examples hold true of the earlier period.

This had been at its most blatant at Brest - Litovsk when in the absence of any military strength, propaganda had been the Bolsheviks only weapon. Now propaganda was used to supplement more accepted diplomatic behaviour. With an eye to the world's press and their sympathisers abroad, the Russians once again paraded their recent martyrdom and supposed moral superiority. This, Moscow realized, would make an effective contrast with the attitude of the Entente Powers, who having failed to crush the revolution by military means,⁶⁷ were now portrayed as trying to reimpose economic control over Russia by alternative methods. Every future international conference in which the Soviet Union was to participate, was used, like Genoa, as a platform for the dissemination of Soviet propaganda, while the diplomats occupied themselves with the more exacting task of negotiation.

Finally, the very secrecy of the negotiations in the Rapallo hotel suite, and the subsequent Soviet-German military agreements, represented a complete contradiction of what purported to be a "truly democratic foreign policy conducted absolutely openly before the entire people." The gulf between the public stance of the Soviet Government, and its actions, could hardly have been wider.⁶⁸ These contradictions, though

⁶⁷ See, R.H.Ullman, "Intervention and the War", (London, 1961), and "Britain and the Russian Civil War", (London, 1966). J.Swettenham "Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919". (London, 1967). J.Bradley, "Allied Intervention in Russia", (London, 1968). G.A.Brinkley, "The Volunteer Army and Allied Intervention in South Russia, 1917-1921.", (Notre Dame, 1966).

⁶⁸ After Rapallo, as Nicolson comments wryly "with the waning of their first fine careless rapture, the style, the behaviour, the external appearance and the urbanity of the representatives of Soviet Russia approximated ever close and closer to that of pre-war Balkan diplomatists." Nicolson, "Diplomacy", p.59.

not openly acknowledged by Soviet writers, were presumably justified by the need to safeguard the revolution:

In its first extensive diplomatic duel with the capitalist states, Soviet diplomacy, led by V.I. Lenin, managed to honourably champion the interests of the country of Socialism, guaranteeing the preservation of its independence and sovereignty.⁶⁹

Throughout the complicated and sterile negotiations at Genoa and the Hague the Russians demonstrated, and not only by their dress,⁷⁰ that they could be scrupulously correct in diplomatic methods and skilled in the use of tactics, both orthodox and otherwise. Though this was the Soviet Government's first foray into international affairs, it had succeeded in leaving the Entente in some disarray, and had detached Germany from the Western bloc, thus gaining a foothold in the enemy camp and economic and military links⁷¹ with an industrial Power. In addition Moscow had without making any significant concessions, asserted its independence and had re-established Russia as a factor of some importance in European affairs.⁷² All this had been achieved by the use of diplomatic and non-diplomatic methods which were found to require little modification over the next twenty years of Soviet international activity.

In late 1922, Soviet diplomacy was confronted once more by exclusion from an important international conference. The

⁶⁹ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III. p.294.

⁷⁰ Von Laue, "Soviet Diplomacy: G.V. Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930" in Craig and Gilbert, "The Diplomats" p.240.

⁷¹ See, Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.247-282, for an estimate of the advantages Russia gained from the military and naval collaboration with Germany. See also, Rosenbaum, "Community of Fate", pp.220-241.

⁷² R.M. Slusser, "The Role of the Foreign Ministry", in I.J. Lederer, ed., "Russian Foreign Policy", (Yale, 1962), p.213. Slusser points out that the fact that Russia was invited to Genoa merely underlined her more normal state of isolation.

end of the Turko - Greek crisis in 1922 necessitated the holding of a new peace conference, at Lausanne,⁷³ to settle a series of Middle Eastern problems, including that of the Black Sea Straits, an area of obvious interest for Soviet Russia. Although Russia was not initially invited to the Conference, Soviet protests⁷⁴ appeared to bear some fruit in that, on October 27th the Soviet Government was invited to take part in the commission dealing with territorial and military questions, which was to include the problem of the Straits in its work. Further Russian protests⁷⁵ against this limitation of its participation were ignored.

As he had prior to Genoa, Lenin outlined the Soviet position before the delegation, once again headed by Chicherin, left for Lausanne:

Firstly, the satisfaction of Turkish national aspirations. Secondly, our programme includes the closing of the Straits for all warships in time of peace or war. This is in the most immediate commercial interests of all Powers, not only of those in close proximity to the Straits but of the rest.... Thirdly, our programme concerning the Straits includes complete freedom for merchant shipping.⁷⁶

The delegation arrived at Lausanne on December 1st, 1922, where the negotiations concerning the regime of the Straits soon crystallized into a verbal struggle between Chicherin and the head of the British delegation, Lord Curzon.⁷⁷ Chicherin advocated the closure of the Straits to warships at all times,⁷⁸

⁷³ Fisher, "The Soviets in World Affairs", Vol.I, pp.400-414.

⁷⁴ See DVP, Vol.V, pp.594-595. Degras, Vol.I, pp.339-340.

⁷⁵ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, pp.308-309. Chicherin's note of acceptance, strongly criticised the proposed extent of Soviet participation. Degras, Vol.I, pp.342-345.

⁷⁶ V.I.Lenin, "Polnoe sobranie sochinenii", pp.240-241.

⁷⁷ Curzon was Foreign Secretary from 1919-1924.

⁷⁸ DVP, Vol.VI, No.17, p.36. Declaration of the Russo-Ukraino-Georgian delegations at the first meeting of the Straits Commission of the Lausanne Conference, December 4th, 1922. Despite the mention of the Ukraine and Georgia, the Soviet delegation represented the views of Moscow alone. On December 30th, 1922 the RSFSR became the USSR.

recalling the aid which the White Generals Denikin and Wrangel had received through the Black Sea. Curzon wanted the Straits zone to be demilitarized and the Straits to remain open, possibly as a means of exerting naval pressure on the Soviet Union should this ever prove necessary. Faced by the opposition of Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Roumania, Greece and, at times of Yugoslavia, the position of the Soviet Union was extremely weak, and Chicherin's eloquence of no avail. He described Curzon's position as aiming at,

the creation of a system directed against Russia. We offer you peace, but you endlessly prolong the struggle against us... We are not offering you battle, but peace, based upon the principle of equality between us and upon the principle of the freedom and sovereignty of Turkey.⁸⁰

This emphasis on Turkish rights and aspirations was typical of the Soviet approach at Lausanne and was to reappear at the Montreux Conference of 1936. The Soviet Union and Turkey shared a diplomatic relationship similar to that between Russia and Germany, a relationship of two outcasts.⁸¹ Despite this, neither state was in a strong enough position to successfully oppose the other members of the Commission, and indeed Turkish behaviour was often inconsistent with her professed unity of views with the USSR delegation, as Chicherin noted on December 12th.⁸² The Turks decided that an arrangement

⁷⁹ For details of this assistance from the Allies, and an account of the Civil War in this area, see, P.Kenez, "Civil War in South Russia" (Berkeley, 1971).

⁸⁰ "Godovoi otchet za 1923g NKID II mu s'ezdu Sovetov SSSR", (Moscow, 1924), p.18, quoted in Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatti", p.313.

⁸¹ See, Yu. A. Bagirov, "Iz istorii sovetsko - turetskikh otnoshenii v 1920-1922gg", (Baku, 1965). pp.119-136, for details of moral and material support given to Turkey by the Soviet Union.

⁸² DVP, Vol.VI, No.32, p.72. Letter from the President of the Russo-Ukraino-Georgian delegation at the Lausanne Conference to Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs RSFSR, M.M. Litvinov, December 12th, 1922. In Chicherin's opinion the Turkish delegate, Ismet Pasha, seemed over anxious to accommodate the British. For Ismet Pasha's role at Lausanne, see, R.H. Davison, "Turkish Diplomacy from Mudros to Lausanne", in Craig and Gilbert, "The Diplomats", pp.199-208.

with the Entente Powers had more to offer, and began separate talks⁸³ with Curzon. The Conference then adjourned on February 4th, 1923, and did not meet again until April 1923.

The Soviet representative at this final stage of the Conference was the Soviet envoy in Rome, V.V. Vorovsky, who found that the Soviet delegation was to be excluded from participation in the discussions regarding the as yet unsettled problem of the Straits.⁸⁴ To this diplomatic slight was added the assassination of Vorovsky, on May 10th, 1923.⁸⁵ On July 24th the Lausanne Convention of the Straits⁸⁶ was completed, the Soviet Union being invited to add its signature.

The new Convention demilitarized the Straits Zone and placed it under the control of an International Commission. Any one Power was given the right to send "at all times and under all circumstances" no more than three warships (none exceeding 10,000 tons) into the Black Sea. The warships which any one Power might send through the Straits in peacetime were not to exceed the strength of the most powerful Black Sea fleet (i.e. the Russian fleet). Considering the parlous state of the Russian Navy in 1923,⁸⁷ this guaranteed potential Western naval superiority in the Black Sea area.

The Conference at Lausanne thus represented a total failure for Soviet diplomacy, as the new Convention contained virtually every point against which Chicherin⁸⁸ had spoken.

⁸³ Chicherin protested against these separate talks. See, Gorokhov, "G.V. Chicherin - diplomat leninskoi shokli", p.97.

⁸⁴ For Chicherin's comments on this decision, see, Degras, Vol.I, pp.383-384.

⁸⁵ See, *ibid.*, pp.392-394.

⁸⁶ See Appendix No.1.

⁸⁷ See, J. Meister, "The Soviet Navy", (London, 1972), pp.7-8.

⁸⁸ For details of Chicherin's diplomatic activities at Lausanne, see, Gorokhov, "G.V. Chicherin - diplomat leninskoi shkoli", pp. 92-100. Zarnitsky and Sergeev, "Chicherin", pp.179-197.

Vorovsky's assassination added a final touch of gloom to the Soviet position. On this occasion there had been no Rapallo with which to confront the Allies, and although Soviet-Turkish relations remained close after Lausanne,⁸⁹ the Allies had indisputably secured their main objectives. Nevertheless it was decided to sign the finished document. Chicherin explained that this step was being taken in the interests of peace, however,

if in practice the application of the convention reveals that it inadequately guarantees the trade interests and security of the Soviet republics, they will be forced to raise the question of nullifying it.⁹⁰

The interests of peace were also given as the reason behind the Soviet decision not to ratify the convention. This would, it was claimed, enable the Soviet Government "to defend the interests of peace in the Middle East."⁹¹

The Russian refusal to ratify the Convention recalls Lenin's attitude to the Treaty of Brest - Litovsk. The position adopted by the Soviet delegation was similarly one of martyrdom at the hands of the combined forces of capitalism. This, plus its self-appointed position as champion of Turkey and the other Black Sea nations, perhaps gave the Soviet Government a certain moral strength, but this could in no way compensate for its diplomatic failure:

⁸⁹ See, A.F. Miller, "Ocherki noveishei istorii Turtsii", (Moscow, 1948). V.M. Alekseev and M.A. Kerimov, "Vneshnyaya politika Turtsii", (Moscow 1961).

⁹⁰ DVP, Vol. VI, No.223, p.392. Telegram from the President of the Russo-Ukraino-Georgian delegation at the Lausanne Conference to the General Secretary of the Conference, Massigli, July 19th 1923.

⁹¹ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.323. Fischer's explanation of the Soviet decision to sign the convention carries much weight: "this would be the first international instrument to bear her name and would thus give her a recognised political status in world politics, and, partly, because with all its limitations and prejudiced position, the International Commission would still exercise some jurisdiction over the Straits." Fischer, "The Soviets in World Affairs", Vol.I., p.413.

The work of the Lausanne Conference showed that the only delegation which consistently and persistently upheld the interests of universal peace and security, the interests of the Black Sea nations, and was vitally concerned for the creation of a just regime for the Straits and the averting of new acts of aggression, was the delegation of the Soviet republics.⁹²

Although the Soviet Government continued to attach importance to its participation in international conferences and agreements, there was one sphere of international activity against which Moscow maintained an unrelenting hostility. From its very creation the League of Nations had been consistently denounced by the Soviet Union as an organisation for the perpetuation of the dominance of the victor-Powers:

The League is a cover for the preparation of military action for the further suppression of small and weak nationalities. To a considerable degree it is only a diplomatic bourse, where the strong Powers arrange their business and conduct their mutual accounts behind the back and at the expense of the small and weak nations.⁹³

Until the requirements of Soviet foreign policy changed, Moscow maintained its opposition to the League, which was described either as being weak and helpless in the face of imperialist aggression,⁹⁴ or as a hostile imperialist coalition preparing to attack the USSR. In his report to the Fourteenth Congress of the CPSU, on December 18th, 1925, Stalin referred to the League as "an organisation for covering up the preparations for war."⁹⁵ In 1928, the Soviet Union was still resolved

⁹² B.A. Dranov, "Chernomorskie prolivi", (Moscow, 1948), p.198.

⁹³ Degras, Vol.II. p.64. This statement, made by Litvinov on November 23rd, 1925, makes a striking contrast with his utterances after the USSR had become a member of the League on September 18th, 1934.

⁹⁴ See Degras, Vol.II, p.188. Rykov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, continued his general denunciation of the League by claiming that the imperialist Powers were trying to prove that "our refusal to enter it is a sign that we do not wish to fight for peace." This tactic, which in this case Rykov attributes to the West, was typical of the Soviet argument that "those who are not with us, are against us", an argument, one suspects, designed principally for public consumption.

⁹⁵ J.V. Stalin, Report to the XIV Congress of the CPSU, December 18th, 1925, "Works", Vol.7, (Moscow, 1954), p.303.

not to join the League :

The Government of the USSR... will never enter into the structure of the League of Nations. Only by remaining outside the League of Nations will the Government of the USSR have the opportunity to hamper the activities... of the League, which are...directed towards the creation of an agreement capable of making it easier for the imperialist bourgeoisie to prepare a new world war. Only in such a way can the USSR unmask the role of the League as the centre around which is organised reactionary imperialist forces for an attack on the Soviet Union.⁹⁶

This hostility to the League did not prevent the USSR from participating in many of the functional and technical conferences sponsored by the League in the spheres of Health, Communications, Drugs, Statistics, Refugee Organisations and the International Labour Organisation.⁹⁷ This participation did not indicate that Moscow had moved any closer to that spirit generally presumed to be the motivating force at Geneva.

Throughout the period 1917-1939 the USSR retained, to varying degrees, its peculiarly paranoid approach to international affairs. Moscow interpreted any diplomatic activity undertaken to the exclusion of the Soviet Union as a prelude to further intervention against Russia,⁹⁸ a view for which there is no evidence whatsoever. Thus the Locarno Agreements⁹⁹ of October 1925 between Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and

⁹⁶ S. Yavorsky, "Liga natsii i podgotovka novykh voyn", (Moscow, 1928), p.89. For further hostile works concerning the League, see, B. Boretsky, "Liga natsii i orudie voyny", (Moscow, 1927). K.G. Rakovsky, "Liga natsii i SSSR", (Moscow, 1926). L.N. Ivanov, "Liga natsii", (Moscow, 1929).

⁹⁷ See, D.I. Buzinkai, "Soviet-League Relations 1919-1939: A Survey and analysis", (Unpublished Ph.D.thesis, New York University, 1964) Chapters V, VI, and VII. K. Davis, "The Soviets at Geneva; the USSR and the League of Nations, 1919-1933." (Geneva, 1934).

⁹⁸ A typical example of this attitude is an article by I.F. Ivashin, "The USSR's struggle against the attempts to form Anti-Soviet Blocs", International Affairs, (Moscow, 1957), No.9, pp. 26-30.

⁹⁹ For an account of the historical background and terms of the Locarno agreements, see, "Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939" (Hereinafter: DBFP), Series Ia, Vol.I, No.1, pp. 1-17.

Italy, were described as just another aspect of League activity aimed at provoking another war:"... we think that Locarno is a plan for the disposition of forces for a new war and not for peace."¹⁰⁰

In December, 1925 the Soviet Union was invited¹⁰¹ to send a delegation to the Preparatory Commission for Disarmament which had been established under the aegis of the League of Nations in Geneva. On January 16th, 1926, the Soviet Government accepted the invitation.¹⁰² The principal reason for Moscow's decision to participate in these disarmament negotiations seems to have been that they offered an opportunity of immense propaganda value. From its own experience at the Moscow Conference of December 1922,¹⁰³ the Soviet Government realised

¹⁰⁰ J.V. Stalin, Report to the XIV Congress of the CPSU, December 18th, 1925, "Works", Vol.7, p. 283.

¹⁰¹ For the text of this invitation, see, DVP, Vol.IX, pp.30-32.

¹⁰² DVP, Vol.IX, No.20, pp.29-30. Letter from People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the President of the League Council, January 16th, 1926. Chicherin pointed out that difficulties with the Swiss Government concerning the assassination of Vorovsky at Lausanne in 1923 would have to be settled before a Soviet delegation could go to Geneva. Thus the first three sessions of the Commission took place without Soviet participation. See also, *ibid.*, No.21, p.33. Litvinov later implied that the League's choice of Switzerland as the venue for the Commission had been deliberate. Degras, Vol.II, p.280.

¹⁰³ The Soviet Government had organised an arms reduction Conference in Moscow from December 2nd-12th, 1922. The participants, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and the USSR eventually agreed in principle to a 25% cut in land forces. However, the complete lack of trust between the USSR and the other participants led to the failure of the Conference, giving Litvinov the opportunity to denounce the other delegations for their "ill-concealed attempt to wreck the present conference, with the aim of creating the semblance of some progress which could only have led to a mistaken thirst for peace and release from the burdens of war for the masses." DVP, Vol.VI, No.29, p.64. Speech of the Soviet delegate at the meeting of the Military-Technical Commission of the Moscow disarmament Conference, December 12th 1922. The failure, in Soviet eyes, was considered less significant than "the very fact that the first-ever international disarmament conference was held in the capital of a socialist country." Ponomaryov, "History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.192.

both how intractable the problem of international disarmament was, and how much propaganda capital was to be gained.¹⁰⁴

The period 1925 to 1927 was, according to Stalin,¹⁰⁵ one which witnessed a worsening of the contradictions of the capitalist world, contradictions which were expected to lead to new wars. Thus a firm Soviet call for peace and disarmament at Geneva would reveal the other Powers as warmongers,¹⁰⁶ which in turn would strengthen the revolutionary movements around the world. In addition a demonstration of the supposed insincerity of the Powers would lend weight to Stalin's internal plans for rapid industrialization under the stimulus of the danger of war and intervention. Thus whatever the course of events at Geneva the Soviet Union could not lose; in the unlikely event of its disarmament proposals being accepted and implemented, Moscow could claim the credit without suffering any military disadvantages; if the negotiations proved abortive, then the USSR would appear as the one nation prepared to make concrete suggestions in the cause of peace and disarmament. Meanwhile the task of the nation was to strive to "strengthen the USSR's defensive capacity."¹⁰⁷

Litvinov's¹⁰⁸ opening speech at the fourth session of the Preparatory Commission on November 30th, 1927, contained a

¹⁰⁴ See, Taracouzio, "War and Peace in Soviet Diplomacy", pp. 115-117.

¹⁰⁵ For Stalin's evaluation of the International situation on December 3rd, 1927, see "Pyatnadtsatii s'ezd VKP (b); stenograficheskii otchet", (Moscow, 1961), Vol.I, pp.43-55.

¹⁰⁶ See, Barghoorn, "Soviet Foreign Propaganda", pp. 105-108. Barghoorn states that Moscow put forward utopian proposals with the deliberate intention of eliciting refusals for propaganda purposes.

¹⁰⁷ "Pyatnadtsatii s'ezd VKP (b)", Vol.I, p.55.

¹⁰⁸ Maxim Maximovitch Litvinov was Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs until July 21st, 1930, when he became Commissar.

comprehensive proposal for general and complete disarmament. This was to be achieved within a time limit of one year, which could be extended in the event of objections on the part of other Powers. At the fifth session of the Commission in March, 1928 the Soviet proposal was, in effect, rejected by France, Japan, the USA and Britain, whose representative described the Russian plans as propaganda.¹¹⁰ In response the Soviet delegate repeated the familiar phrases, "we continue to believe that general and immediate disarmament represents the only effective guarantee of peace, corresponding not only to the remote ideals but to the vital present day demands of mankind".¹¹¹

Stalin had already poured scorn on the work of the Preparatory Commission:

Or take, for example the recent declaration of the Soviet delegation in Geneva on the question of genuine disarmament (and not window-dressing). What is the explanation of the fact that comrade Litvinov's straightforward and honest declaration in favour of complete disarmament struck the League of Nations with paralysis and came as a "complete surprise" to it? Does not this fact show that the League of Nations

109 Litvinov outlined his proposal in a press statement of November 22nd, 1927, before his departure for Geneva. He also described the League's previous work on disarmament as "meaningless declarations and a heap of resolutions and proposals, intended to serve the purposes of one or another international group." He mentioned the USSR's record in the field of disarmament, citing the November Peace Decree, the proposal made at Genoa and the Moscow Conference as examples of Soviet devotion to peace, and the reduction of armaments. Litvinov stated that the reason for Soviet participation was to deprive "its enemies of the possibility of attributing to it, even in the smallest degree, the possible failure of the conference, and its neighbours of an excuse for their refusal to disarm on the ground that the USSR was absent from the conference." Degras, Vol.II, pp, 278-280.

110 See, DBFP, Series 1A, Vol.IV, No.295. British Delegation (Geneva) to Western Department, March 4th, 1928. The Russian proposals were in fact referred to a sub-committee, which was tantamount to their rejection, but had none of its disadvantages. See *ibid.*, Nos. 304, 309, 312 and 330.

111 "V bor'be za mir"; sovetskaya delegatsiya na V sessii komissii po razoruzheniyu", (Moscow, 1928), p.33.

is not an instrument of peace and disarmament but an instrument for covering up new armaments and the preparation of wars.¹¹²

At the sixth session of the Preparatory Commission, which met between April 15th and May 6th, 1929, and from November 6th to December 9th, 1930, the modified proposal for progressive disarmament put forward by the Soviet delegation met the same fate as its predecessor.

Total disarmament remained a consistent Soviet plea until Hitler's accession to power, in 1933, made the security of the USSR a more pressing problem.¹¹³ It was as true in 1933 as it had been in 1925 that, "The Bolsheviks have been demanding disarmament ever since the time of Genoa",¹¹⁴ That nothing had been achieved could be blamed on the machinations of the capitalist Powers. The frequent Soviet demands for disarmament, however attractive in theory, seem to have been made more with propaganda and the discomfiture of the West in mind, than the achievement of their expressed aim, for disarmament, today, as in the inter-war years is a matter requiring long and complex negotiations and a certain amount of trust, and not the tedious repetition of slogans.¹¹⁵ This is an attitude with some bearing on Soviet diplomatic activity in 1938 and 1939, with regard to the calling of an international conference to deal with the threatening situation in Europe.

¹¹² "Pyatnadtsatii s'ezd VKP (b)", Vol.I, p.48.

¹¹³ On only one occasion before 1933 did a Soviet delegate stress the need for security as the key to a programme of disarmament. This was at the Rome Naval Conference of 1924. Buzinkai, "Soviet League Relations, 1919-1939", p.109.

¹¹⁴ J.V.Stalin, Report to the XIV Congress of the CPSU, December 18th, 1925, "Works", Vol.7, p.287.

¹¹⁵ This is not to suggest that the USSR was in any way responsible for the failure of disarmament in the 1930s, a failure which with hindsight seems to have been inevitable. It was merely Moscow's good fortune that so much propaganda could be made out of the situation. For a Soviet view of the USSR's policy towards disarmament, see, V.M.Khaitzman, "SSSR i problema razoruzheniya, 1918-1940, (Moscow, 1959). See also, W.L.Mahaney, "The Soviet Union, the League of Nations and Disarmament, 1917-1935", (Philadelphia, 1940).

One minor episode in the Soviet diplomacy of the inter-war period was the strenuous Russian attempt to participate in the Kellogg - Briand Pact, which renounced war as an instrument of national policy. Aristide Briand, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs had on April 6th, 1927 proposed that France and the USA should conclude such a pact. Frank Kellogg, the US Secretary of State, replied by suggesting a multilateral pact outlawing war to which all the major Powers would be invited to accede. The USSR was, however, not invited to sign. On August 27th, 1928, the Pact was signed by fifteen countries.¹¹⁶

Moscow chose to interpret its exclusion from the Pact as an anti-Soviet act,¹¹⁷ but nevertheless announced its readiness to sign the agreement, despite its shortcomings, in particular the lack of any mention of disarmament.¹¹⁸ In response to a French invitation¹¹⁹ the USSR joined the list of signatories on August 31st, 1928.¹²⁰ The Pact itself, though well-intentioned was virtually meaningless. The Soviet attitude to the Pact was, however, typical of the demonstrative diplomacy followed by the USSR during both this period, and the years between 1933 and 1939. After having denounced the Pact as

¹¹⁶ For the text of the Kellogg - Briand Pact, see, "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1928" (Hereinafter:FRUS), (Washington, 1942), Vol.I, pp.153-157.

¹¹⁷ Degras, Vol.II, pp.322-323. Chicherin pointed out that the Pact's "prohibition of war as an instrument of national policy was a metaphorical expression of the preparation of war as an instrument of world counter-revolution... the Kellogg pact is an integral part of the preparation of war against the USSR."

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 324-325.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 333-335.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 335-339. On February 9th, 1929 the Kellogg Pact was used as the basis for the Moscow or Litvinov Protocol signed between the USSR, Estonia, Latvia, Poland and Roumania (Turkey, Iran and Lithuania signed later in 1929). For the text of this Protocol, see, "Dokumenti i materialy po istorii sovetsko - pol'skikh otnoshenii" (Hereinafter: SPO), (Moscow, 1967), Vol.V, No.215, pp. 359-361.

anti-Soviet in nature, Moscow protested at its exclusion.

Having once signed the Pact, thus demonstrating "that the basis of Soviet foreign policy was a sincere longing to guarantee security in the interests of its people and of all progressive mankind",¹²¹ Soviet sources claim that Russia's co-signatories, the imperialist Powers, "in fact continued their aggressive policy."¹²² This type of behaviour can have done little to induce Western governments to relax their customary attitude of suspicion towards Soviet Russia.

The two aspects of international relations which the USSR presented to the capitalist world were most apparent in these early years of Bolshevik rule. The one, dedicated to the Marxist proposition that socialism was destined to replace capitalism, was represented by the Comintern. The other, based on the reality of Russia's international position, was represented by the Peoples Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel). Since both were in effect controlled by an inner party core, the dualism inherent in the uneasy co-existence of the two organizations was confined to certain limits. For a time, after the October Revolution it was the messianic approach of the Comintern which predominated. Later, the Narkomindel grew in importance, as the Comintern gradually became little more than a useful instrument of control over foreign Communist parties.¹²³

¹²¹ V.G.Trukhanovsky, et al. eds., "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politike SSSR", (Moscow, 1967), p.241.

¹²² Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.523. For a more detailed Soviet account of the History of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, see, A.E.Ioffe, "Vneshnyaya politika sovetskogo soyuza, 1928-32 gg", (Moscow, 1968), pp.38-54.

¹²³ See, R.D.Warh, "Soviet Russia in World Politics", (London, 1963), p.97.

In the first sixteen years of the Soviet regime, Russian Conference Diplomacy cannot be said to have played a major part in Moscow's foreign policy. The USSR, in 1933, was still very much on the periphery of European affairs, a situation which Soviet participation at Genoa, the Hague, Lausanne, and in the Preparatory Disarmament Commission, had done little to alter. Indeed, to a certain extent the legacy of mistrust stemming from this early period of Soviet diplomacy, was to make the insistent Russian demands for collective security of the late 1930s, seem to Western governments, like one more Bolshevik aberration. Moscow could no doubt distinguish between its own propaganda and its real intentions. Western leaders were in general not prepared to make such distinctions, especially when to do so would conflict with long held views or prejudices. Soviet conduct at those international gatherings in which the USSR had participated, invariably caused considerable irritation among the other delegates, who, whatever their opinions of the Soviet regime, considered the transaction of business, and not the dissemination of propaganda, to be the main purpose of such meetings.

Although Moscow's foreign policy aims in the years 1933-1939 had changed, Soviet Conference Diplomacy was to demonstrate a high degree of continuity with its earlier period. The Soviet approach to international conferences continued to be a compound of a need for prestige, a desire to extract the maximum propaganda value, inflexibility in negotiation, and a readiness to pursue alternative policies simultaneously. To expect the Soviet regime in its weakness "to refrain from making use of its revolutionary tools, was as futile as to ask the British Empire to scrap its fleet."¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Von Laue, "Soviet Diplomacy: G.V. Chicherin, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, 1918-1930", in Craig and Gilbert. "The Diplomats", p. 246.

The internal situation of the USSR had changed considerably by the beginning of 1933. The first Five Year Plan had been completed in four years which meant that a sound basis for further industrial progress had been created, although agricultural production was still severely affected by the results of the enforced collectivisation programme. Stalin's personal position at the head of the Party and of the nation was assured and his control of the Comintern was virtually complete.¹

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 marked the adoption of the policy of all-out opposition to the foreign socialist and social-democrat parties on the grounds that they would inevitably betray the cause of the proletarian revolution.² The rise of National Socialism in Germany, and Hitler's accession to power on January 30th, 1933, initially led to no alteration of Comintern policy. It was assumed that the Nazi triumph was merely a temporary prelude to a German proletarian revolution. This view was not publicly abandoned until the Seventh Comintern Congress (July-August, 1935) adopted the policy of a broad anti-Fascist front composed of Communist and any other political parties opposed to Fascism.³

¹ R.Conquest, "The Great Terror", pp. 574-575. The assassination of S.M.Kirov on December 1st, 1934, removed Stalin's last potential rival. See Ibid., pp. 71-96.

² L.Schapiro, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union", (London 1966), pp. 366-367. For an account of Soviet attitudes to Nazism, see, Laqueur, "Russia and Germany", pp. 196-251.

³ Ibid., pp. 483-484.

The international situation which confronted the Soviet Union in the early months of 1933 was, from Moscow's standpoint, distinctly unsatisfactory. The most direct threat to Soviet security was in the Far East, where Japanese activity was continuing in the puppet state of Manchukuo which Japan had set up in the March of the previous year. The establishment of Manchukuo meant that Manchuria no longer acted as a buffer between Japan and Russia who now faced each other along an extended frontier.⁴ This tension in the Far East had been a preoccupation of the Soviet Government since the beginning of Japanese aggression in China, but it was at least a situation which could, if necessary, be countered by military means without grave international implications, given the general breakdown of international law in the area.

In Europe, Hitler's coming to power led to the deterioration of Soviet - German relations to an extent which Moscow could not afford to ignore. The threat posed by Nazi Germany to the USSR was greatly exaggerated in the Soviet press, no doubt partly for reasons associated with Stalin's internal political manoeuvres, but of the two external enemies Germany was potentially the more dangerous. The mainstay of Soviet foreign policy since Rapallo had been the relationship with Weimar Germany, and thus the crucial factor in the cautious and gradual reorientation of Soviet international relations in the years 1933-1934 was the breakdown of the Soviet - German alliance.

⁴ H.J.Timperley, "Japan in Manchukuo", Foreign Affairs, No.2, (New York), January 1934, pp.295-305. See also, H.L.Moore, "Soviet Far Eastern Policy 1931-1945" (Princeton, 1945), pp.1-26. For a detailed study of the reactions of the Western Powers to Japanese activity in the Far East, see, C.Thorne, "The Limits of Foreign Policy", (London, 1972).

The relationship between the two countries had not been without problems. Germany's inclusion in the Locarno Agreements and her subsequent entry into the League of Nations on September 8th, 1926, had caused considerable concern in Moscow. Despite Stresemann's⁵ assurances, the Narkomindel was conscious of the possibility that it might be deprived of the fruits of Rapallo by a German rapprochement with the Versailles Powers. Russia was therefore in a position of some delicacy, which her recent harvest of recognitions⁶ did little to improve, for international isolation was a danger which the Soviet Government had been striving to avoid since 1918. Stresemann had, however, skillfully maintained satisfactory German relations with the Soviet Union by the conclusion of the Treaty of Berlin with Russia on April 24th, 1926. In fact the timing of the treaty was chosen as much to demonstrate German independence to Britain and France, as to dispel the apprehensions of the Narkomindel.⁷

Partly as a result of this episode, Moscow began to feel that it could no longer rely exclusively on Germany, and began to consider additional, though not alternative, methods of ensuring Soviet security. In the years 1931-1932 the Soviet Union signed a series of non aggression pacts⁸ with its near neighbours, including Poland, but most significantly of all,

⁵ Gustav Stresemann, German Foreign Minister.

⁶ By 1925 the USSR had established diplomatic relations with Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Austria, Greece, Sweden, China, Denmark, Mexico, France and Japan, in addition to Afghanistan, Turkey and Germany who had recognized the USSR some years previously.

⁷ For details of this period of Soviet-German diplomacy, see, K.Rosenbaum, "Community of Fate", pp. 188-219, and L.H.Dyck, "Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia", pp. 13-19.

⁸ For a detailed discussion of the role of the non-aggression pact in this period, see, J.A.Large, "Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33; The New Alignment, with special reference to the Non-Aggression Pact as an instrument of Soviet Diplomacy." (Unpublished PhD. thesis, Glasgow University, 1972).

with France, on November 29th, 1932.⁹ These treaties were considered to represent,

another blow to the warmongers, to the plans to isolate the USSR and set up an anti-Soviet bloc. These treaties consolidated the Soviet Union's international position. The revival of revanchist trends in Germany forced France to seek an improvement of her relations with the USSR.¹⁰

However, at this date Germany was still the principal pillar of Soviet foreign policy. Trade between Russia and Germany was of great importance, as Germany was the largest single source of Soviet imports, and after Great Britain, the best customer for Russian exports. This economic relationship was confirmed by the Piatakov Agreement of April 14th, 1931,¹¹ and the political links between the two states seemed to be assured by the signing of the Protocol for the Renewal of the Treaty of Berlin on June 24th, 1931. The delay in Germany's ratification of this, indicated some change in the diplomatic atmosphere.¹²

After the death of Stresemann, whose skill proved to be irreplaceable,¹³ the Soviet - German relationship proved less

⁹ See, M.Mourin, "Les relations Franco-soviétiques, 1917-1967", (Paris, 1967), pp. 174-177, and Yu.V.Borisov, "Sovetsko-frantsuskie otnosheniya, 1924-1945", (Moscow, 1964), pp.163-174. For the text of the Franco-Soviet Pact, see, "Documents Diplomatiques Francais, 1932-1939", (Hereinafter: DDF), Ire Série, Vol.II, Nos. 29 and 48.

¹⁰ Ponomaryov, "History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.300.

¹¹ See, Dyck, "Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia", pp.220-224, for an account of Soviet-German economic relations in this period.

¹² See, *ibid.*, pp.229-236.

¹³ "Stresemann's policy continued to bear fruit: Germany could balance between the East and West, deriving political, economic, and military benefits from this position." Rosenbaum, "Community of Fate", p.241.

able to withstand the increasing fluctuations at the political level. Yet although relations with the shortlived Brüning and von Papen Governments¹⁴ had been somewhat less than satisfactory for the Soviet Union, Molotov¹⁵ could still say in January, 1933, seven days before Hitler became Chancellor:

Germany occupies a special place in our foreign relations. Of all the countries maintaining diplomatic relations with us we have had and now have the strongest economic connexions with Germany. That is no accident. It arises from the interests of the two countries.¹⁶

Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher told Litvinov on December 19th, 1932, that as long as he was head of the German Government, friendly relations with the Soviet Union were guaranteed.¹⁷

Six weeks later Hitler came to power. On December 29th, 1933, Litvinov reported to the Central Executive Committee that "in the past year our relations with Germany have become, it may be said, unrecognizable."¹⁸

The USSR was now moving towards a transitional point in the conduct of its foreign affairs. It had emerged from the isolation of the early 1920s and was now recognized 'de jure' by most of the major Powers. (The USA did not recognize the USSR until November 1933¹⁹). A wide range of neutrality and non-aggression pacts had been established between Russia and her neighbours. But despite this, the Soviet Union was not a fully accepted member of the international community. The reasons for this state of affairs were several; the basic ideological hostility between the Soviet and capitalist systems;

¹⁴ Heinrich Brüning, Reichschancellor 1930-1932; Franz von Papen, Reichschancellor, May - December, 1932.

¹⁵ V.M. Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars.

¹⁶ Degras, Vol. III, p. 1.

¹⁷ Dyck, "Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia", pp. 254-255. Schleicher was Chancellor from December 2nd, 1932 to January 30th, 1933.

¹⁸ Degras, Vol. III. p. 55.

¹⁹ For details of the US recognition of the Soviet Union, see, FRUS, The Soviet Union, 1933-1939, pp. 1-55.

the activities of Moscow - directed foreign Communist parties; the continuous Soviet propaganda attacks on the West and the League of Nations; Moscow's suspicion of the intentions of the capitalist states and its own preoccupation with internal affairs, all played their part. In addition to these factors, the attitude of the ruling circles of the Western democracies to the Soviet Union, as was shown by their policies, consisted of a curious refusal to recognize the USSR as anything other than a peripheral Power of considerable irritant value.²⁰

However, the strengthening of the Soviet Union both internally and internationally gave the Soviet Government a certain amount of room for manoeuvre with which to counter the twin threats of Japan and Nazi Germany - a luxury which the Bolsheviks had lacked in 1918. Soviet demands for peace and disarmament continued, but gradually the Narkomindel began to direct its policies more towards the containment of the sources of aggression than to purely defensive attempts to guarantee the security of the Soviet Union:

Under the new conditions, the neutrality and non-aggression pacts which the Soviet Union had concluded with a number of countries became insufficient. It was imperative to counteract the combined forces of the aggressors with a united front of peace-loving states.²¹

This realignment of Soviet foreign policy was to reach its culmination on September 18th, 1934, when the Soviet Union became a member of the League of Nations, after which, the policy of collective security against Fascist aggression became the dominant feature of Soviet international relations. Indeed, the slogan "collective security" would swiftly have become a reality, had its implementation depended upon the

²⁰ See, K.Middlemas, "Diplomacy of Illusion", (London, 1972) pp.27-29.

²¹ Airapetyan, "The Periodisation of the History of Soviet Foreign Policy", International Affairs, p.67.

frequency with which it was subsequently uttered by Soviet diplomats and the Soviet press.²² The possibility of some future accommodation with Nazi Germany was, however, not abandoned, and during the next six years Moscow made various approaches, both open and clandestine, to the German Government.

Before this took place, however, the Soviet Government was, in March 1933, abruptly confronted by the very coalition it had been at such pains to prevent since the first days of its existence - a combination of the major European imperialist nations, a Four Power Pact of Italy, France, Great Britain and Germany. The alarm shown by the Soviet Press at this combination was exceeded only by its lurid reports of the possibility of a German attack on the USSR. This, in 1933, and for some years after, was patently absurd, as informed Soviet circles must have realized from their close knowledge of Germany's secret rearmament. Yet it suited Moscow, both politically and perhaps even psychologically, to create the impression of a re-armed Germany under the leadership of a fanatical anti-communist revanchist actively threatening the

²² 1933 saw Germany and the Soviet Union virtually exchange their respective international roles: "Germany now plunged herself into moral outlawry and political isolation - renouncing her membership in the League of Nations, and therewith her permanent seat on the Council; on the other hand, Russia now renounced her political isolation and sought remission of her moral outlawry - and this with such rapid success that, by the end of the calendar year, she was well on the way towards becoming a member of the League, stepping into the permanent seat on the Council, which Germany had vacated, and being accepted as an ally by France into the bargain."
A.J.Toynbee, ed., "Survey of International Affairs, 1933" (Hereinafter: Survey), (London, 1934), p.185. Toynbee's comment simplifies the issues involved, but nonetheless it indicates the magnitude of the diplomatic changes which took place in 1933.

The attitude of the Soviet Union to its exclusion from the Four Power Pact proposals made by Mussolini on March 18th, 1933, was thus inextricably bound up with the simultaneous deterioration of the Soviet-German relationship.

The initial reaction of the Soviet Government to Hitler's assumption of power was as Herbert von Dirksen, the German Ambassador to Moscow put it, one of "watchful waiting".²⁴ Krestinsky²⁵ informed Dirksen on February 28th that the USSR would not reorientate its foreign policy.²⁶ The Comintern, usually one of the more vociferous of 'Soviet' institutions, in particular remained strangely silent:

In the crucial seven weeks of the Nazi conquest, 1st February to 23rd March, the German Communist Party ordered no uprising, no general strike, and refused to join hands with the Social Democrats in resistance. Indeed the Nazi surge was interpreted as a useful destruction of their Socialist rivals.²⁷

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- ²³ Rudolf Nadolny, the German Ambassador to Russia commented in May 1934:
"There is not the slightest doubt, absurd as it may appear, that...fear of an aggressive policy of Germany, also plays a role in the present case (reorientation of Soviet policy). Since time immemorial the Russians have believed Germany capable of any accomplishment, and the Soviet people cannot be talked out of the hysterical fear of alleged German plans to intervene in the Baltic states and the Ukraine..."
"Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945", (Hereinafter: DGFP), Series C, Vol.II, No.440, p.801. Nadolny to the Foreign Ministry, May 9th, 1934. See, Laqueur, "Russia and Germany", pp.13-25, for an impression of Russian attitudes to Germany and the Germans.
- ²⁴ DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.29, p.64. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, February 20th 1933.
- ²⁵ N.I.Krestinsky, First Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs 1930-1937.
- ²⁶ Ibid., No.41, p.87. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, February 28th, 1933.
- ²⁷ W.E.Scott, "Alliance Against Hitler: The Origin of the Franco-Soviet Pact", (Durham, 1962), p.91.

The Soviet press seemed confident that the Nazi success was to be shortlived, though whether this was an expression of the real opinions or merely of the hopes of the Soviet Government is not certain. On February 14th, Pravda asserted that "...the proletarian revolution is able to liquidate the Fascist dictatorship only over the corpse of Social Democracy."²⁸ The editorial of Izvestia, on March 4th, was similarly sanguine, and in answer to the question "Where are the Nazis leading Germany?", replied:

This question is not difficult to answer. The organising of civil war in the country, the attacks on the Soviet Union, the only state bearing no hostility to Germany, whatever the form or composition of its Government, all this the national-socialists are doing, presumably from the greatest wisdom, but we think, gentlemen national-socialists that your ship will not travel much further.²⁹

However, the activities of the Nazis in Germany and Hitler's speeches, in particular that of March 2nd,³⁰ led the Soviet Government to protest to the German Foreign Minister Neurath on March 8th, 1933. Neurath replied to Khinchuk, the Russian Ambassador, that such things were domestic matters. Khinchuk promised Neurath that he would refrain from publicizing the Soviet protest which was in fact "very embarrassing to him personally".³¹ Despite this, on March 9th, Izvestia carried news of the Russian protest.³²

In a conversation with Dirksen on March 11th, Litvinov commented on the tension between the USSR and Germany, and added:

²⁸ Pravda, February 14th, 1933.

²⁹ Izvestia, March 4th, 1933.

³⁰ See, N.H.Baynes, "The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939", Vol.I. (London, 1942), pp.254-261. The speech was also reported in Izvestia, March 4th, 1933.

³¹ DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.55, pp.119-120. Memorandum by Neurath, March 8th, 1933. See also, DVP., Vol.XVI, No.65, pp.149-150. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Germany to the NKID USSR, March 7th, 1933.

³² Izvestia, March 9th, 1933.

But while the Soviet Government had sought to prevent a German-French alliance in the past by bringing influence to bear on the German side, it would now endeavour to obtain the same objective through closer relations with France.

Dirksen saw this as a hint of a possible Franco-Soviet alliance, but Litvinov assured him that "the Soviet Government would never enter into any alliance with France and in any way confirm the Treaty of Versailles."³³ Less than one year later the Soviet Union was involved in the complex negotiations which led to both the Franco-Soviet Pact and Russian membership of the League of Nations.

The Soviet Government was, however, not allowed the luxury of a consistent German anti-Soviet attitude,³⁴ for Hitler approved a Soviet request for an important credit extension and attempted to explain his Government's position vis-à-vis the USSR in a speech to the Reichstag on March 23rd:

The elimination of Communism in Germany is a purely domestic German affair... The Government of the Reich are ready to cultivate with the Soviet Union friendly relations profitable to both parties.³⁵

But despite this and other similar assurances, the Soviet Government could hardly fail to be disturbed by the rapid destruction of the German Communist Party and the frequent raids on Soviet commercial interests, particularly on 'Derop', the Russo-German oil concern. This spasmodic deterioration of relations with Germany began to lead to a hesitant exploration of other possible methods of guaranteeing Soviet security.

³³ DGFP., Series C, Vol.I, No.73, pp.143-144. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, March 11th, 1933.

³⁴ "Hitler's accession to power thus created uncertainty about Germany's future policy at a moment when the Russians could not stand uncertainty." Scott, "Alliance Against Hitler", p.100.

³⁵ Baynes, "The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922-August 1939", Vol.II, pp.1015-1019.

Dirksen's despatches from Moscow during this period reflect both his own and the Soviet concern over the increasing tension between the two countries. He reported Litvinov's agitation at the series of raids on various 'Derop' premises which had taken place on April 1st:

The impression had been created that an organised anti-Soviet campaign was in progress in Germany. Confidence in the statements made by the Reich Chancellor, by Your Excellency (von Neurath) and by me concerning the unchanged German policy with respect to the Soviet Union, was thereby shaken.³⁶

Litvinov repeated his complaints to Dirksen on April 8th. On the same day, however, Dirksen informed Litvinov that Germany was now prepared to ratify the extension of the Treaty of Berlin, which Litvinov greeted with evident approval. Perhaps in an attempt to cause some apprehension in Berlin, Litvinov told Dirksen that the Soviet Union had been sounding out the attitude of the Little Entente with reference to the possibility of concluding a non-aggression pact with Russia, either as a bloc or on an individual basis. Moscow no doubt hoped that rumours of such a reaction to the Four Power Pact might lead Germany to reconsider both her attitude to Mussolini's suggestion,³⁷ and to the Soviet Union itself.

The negotiations for the Four Power Pact took place

³⁶ DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.134, pp.241-242. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, April 4th, 1933. See also, DVP., Vol.XVI, No.106, pp.210-213. Record of a conversation between the Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR and the German Ambassador to the USSR Dirksen, April 3rd, 1933. In retaliation for German actions against 'Derop' the Soviet Government closed down 'Drusag' the German agricultural concern in the North Caucasus. H. von Dirksen, "Moscow, Tokyo, London", (Norman, 1952), p.124.

³⁷ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.112, pp.221-223. Record of a conversation between the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the German Ambassador to the USSR Dirksen, April 8th, 1933. DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.147, p.271. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, April 8th, 1933. See also, *ibid.*, No.140, pp.252-253. Neurath to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, April 5th 1933. There was a hint of such a diplomatic readjustment in Polish Ambassador Lukasiewicz's report to Beck on April 4th. See, SP0, Vol.VI, No.16. Lukasiewicz to Beck, April 4th, 1933.

against this confused background of generally worsening German-Soviet relations³⁸ and that this inevitably had a profound effect on the Soviet attitude to the Pact, which itself seemed to bode ill for the Soviet Union. Moscow was now faced with the strong probability of isolation, with its German connection threatened³⁹ and as yet with no really viable alternative, especially in view of the fact that the new German leaders, despite their words and actions, seemed to be not entirely unacceptable to international society.

The complex negotiations concerning the Four Power Pact lasted from March to June 1933 and were accurately described by Vansittart as "a diplomatic orgy of niggling metamorphoses".⁴⁰ Mussolini apparently intended his pact to act as some sort of replacement for the ineffective League of Nations and as a means of salvaging at least something from the ailing Disarmament Conference. Hopefully it would also still his apprehensions about Hitler's designs on Austria, but perhaps most of all it would give Italy and her leader a prestigious

³⁸ The French Ambassador in Berlin noted something of a Soviet-German détente following Ambassador Khinchuk's audience with Hitler on April 28th. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.III, No.235. François-Poncet to Paul-Boncour, May 3rd, 1933. For the Soviet account of this interview see, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.138, pp.271-272. Communiqué of the Polpred USSR in Germany on a conversation with Reich Chancellor Hitler, April 28th 1933. The German version can be found in DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.194.

³⁹ The German Ambassador in Rome, Ulrich von Hassell, urged caution on the German side, lest the Russians conclude that Germany was changing the direction of her foreign policy. DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.109, p.202. Hassell to the Foreign Ministry, March 22nd, 1933.

⁴⁰ R.Vansittart, "The Mist Procession", (London, 1958), p.454. Vansittart was at this time the Permanent Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

position in international affairs.⁴¹ Whatever the initial reasons behind Mussolini's decision, western statesmen were not opposed to the traditional remedy of a Great Power directorate.

Mussolini presented the draft version of his proposed "Political Agreement of Understanding and Cooperation between the Four Western Powers" to MacDonald⁴² and Simon⁴³ on the occasion of their visit to Rome (March 18th-20th, 1933). They saw the Pact as being potentially useful, and on March 19th, they and Mussolini made some adjustments to the various articles of the draft Agreement. MacDonald and Simon promised to discuss the proposal with the French on their return to Britain via Paris.⁴⁴ The conversations with Daladier⁴⁵ and Paul-Boncour⁴⁶ revealed that the British and French shared each others apprehensions at German intentions, a fact which made Mussolini's plan the more attractive, despite its shortcomings. The expectation of the failure of the British

⁴¹ See, G.L.Weinberg, "The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany", (Chicago, 1970) pp.47-48. Weinberg suggests that Mussolini's plan may in part have been the result "of the inner conflict between Italy's desire for great power status and its recognition of its lack of resources for this role, a conflict accentuated in the person of Mussolini by an emotional commitment to activism, a hope of glory and power, and a mind that was shrewd and calculating and not without insights when Il Duce was willing to use it."

⁴² James Ramsay MacDonald, British Prime Minister.

⁴³ Sir John Simon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

⁴⁴ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V., No.44. Graham to Vansittart, March 20th, 1933, and No.45. Graham to Vansittart, March 29th, 1933. See also, Ibid, No.40. Graham to Simon, March 16th, 1933 and No.41. Rumbold to Simon, March 16th, 1933.

⁴⁵ Edouard Daladier, President of the French Council of Ministers.

⁴⁶ Joseph Paul-Boncour, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

disarmament proposals⁴⁷ at the Geneva Disarmament Conference was another reason for MacDonald's decision to give the Four Power Pact his consideration. On March 24th, MacDonald instructed Graham, the British Ambassador in Rome, to tell Mussolini that "we may be able shortly to make a further contribution to elucidate the possibilities of the general plan proposed."⁴⁸

The French reaction to the proposal was somewhat mixed. The French Ambassador in Rome, de Jouvenel,⁴⁹ noted on March 17th that Mussolini had modified his original idea of a Franco-Italian collaboration in Europe to a four Power scheme involving Britain and Germany.⁵⁰ The next day he was handed the draft of Mussolini's proposals.⁵¹ Eduard Herriot, chairman of the Radical-Socialist Party, and a former Premier and Foreign Minister, strongly opposed the plan, as did most of the press and public opinion. But, "Daladier found a clever solution to the impossible: while staking his cabinet on the pact's approval, he was content to leave it to the Quai d'Orsay to emasculate it by negotiation."⁵² In addition, France had to combine acceptance of the Pact with the need to appease her allies in Central and Eastern Europe by ensuring that the

⁴⁷ See, DBFP, Series 2, Vol.IV, Appendix IV, for details of the British proposals.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Vol.V., No.50. Simon to Graham, March 24th, 1933.

⁴⁹ On being named Ambassador to Rome in December 1932, Henri de Jouvenel had been given instructions to create with the Italian Government "the basis of an entente which would not put in peril (France's) Mediterranean interests or other alliances". J.Paul-Boncour, "Entre deux guerres", (Paris, 1945). Vol.II, pp.338-339.

⁵⁰ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.II, No.427. De Jouvenel to Paul-Boncour, March 17th, 1933.

⁵¹ Ibid., Vol.III, No.2. De Jouvenel to Paul-Boncour, March 18th, 1933.

⁵² K.H.Jaraus, "The Four Power Pact, 1933", (Wisconsin, 1965), p.89.

finished product was as innocuous as possible.⁵³

Hitler, after repeated assurances from Mussolini, decided to accept the Four Power Pact, possibly because of his rather cavalier approach to international agreements, or he may have been influenced by General Blomberg, his Reichswehr Minister, who apparently felt that "ten years of peace were worth having."⁵⁴ Hitler seems to have believed that with certain modifications the Pact could do Germany no harm, and agreed to participate:

We are willing to collaborate on this basis in full sincerity in the endeavour to unite the four powers: Germany, Italy, England and France in a peaceful political cooperation, a plan which approaches totally and resolutely the tasks upon which the fate of Europe depends.⁵⁵

The reactions of the three Western Powers to Mussolini's suggestion were thus largely positive. In Poland and the Little Entente, however, a considerable degree of hostility was expressed at the idea of the four great Powers cooperating in an agreement encompassing the revision of peace treaties. Paul-Boncour had in fact predicted this reaction on March 21st, in the conversations with MacDonald and Simon.⁵⁶

At Geneva, Simon had been unable to calm the apprehensions of the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister, Eduard Benes, who had expressed the strongest disapproval of any form of Great Power

⁵³ "Lawyers and jurists strained meanings and spun a fine web of casuistical phrases. Treaty revision and the disarmament formula were made dependent on the Covenant of the League of Nations." A.Simone, "J'Accuse!", (London, 1941), p.40.

⁵⁴ E.Wiskemann, "The Rome-Berlin Axis", (London, 1966), pp.50-51.

⁵⁵ "Verhandlungen des Reichstags" (VIII Wahlperiode, 1933) Vol.457, p.30, quoted in Jaraus, "The Four Power Pact, 1933" p.74. For details of the initial German objections to the plan, and their subsequent acceptance, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, under "Four Power Pact."

⁵⁶ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V, No.46. Record of Conversations at the British Embassy, Paris, March 21st, 1933.

Directorate.⁵⁷ On the same day, March 25th, the Permanent Council of the Little Entente issued a statement condemning the Pact proposals:

the states of the Little Entente would find it difficult to agree that the cause of good relations between countries was being served by agreements having it as their object to dispose of the rights of third parties.....The states of the Little Entente also regret that, in the negotiations of the last few days, the idea of a revisionist policy should have been emphasised.⁵⁸

V.Dovgalevsky, the Soviet Ambassador to France, reported on April 9th, that Benes had told him at Geneva that if the Four Power Pact did not disappear, the Little Entente "would be faced by the question of concluding another pact, with the USSR, as a counterweight to the directorate." Dovgalevsky took this as an indication of the seriousness of the Little Entente's opposition, though he added that he "was aware of the value of Benes's words."⁵⁹

Poland's attitude was similarly hostile.⁶⁰ Sir William Erskine, the British Ambassador in Warsaw, noted on March 29th, that the Polish Government had received the news of Mussolini's plan "with concern almost amounting to consternation." He continued,

the prospect of securing acceptance by the Polish Government of the proposals in anything like their present form, seems to me extremely remote. They affect them on the two points on which beyond all others the Poles show extreme sensitiveness - the creation in any form of a concert of Powers from which

⁵⁷ Ibid., No.54. Record of a Conversation between Simon and Benes, March 25th, 1933. The Roumanian Foreign Minister, Nicolae Titulescu, spoke in similar vein to Vansittart. See, ibid., No.84. Record of a Conversation between Titulescu and Vansittart, April, 17th, 1933.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.109.

⁵⁹ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.113, pp.223-225. Letter from the Polpred USSR in France to Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Krestinsky, April 9th, 1933.

⁶⁰ See, J.Beck, "Final Report", (New York, 1957), pp.35-39. Jozef Beck, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

they are excluded and any threat of revision of their frontiers.⁶¹

At this time the European press contained much comment on the possibility of cooperation between Poland and the Little Entente, in view of the hostility which both had shown towards the Pact proposals, but "Even the continuation of a Pan-German fanatic and the Four Power Pact had not inspired cooperation between Poland and Czechoslovakia."⁶² Moscow would have welcomed such cooperation, had it led to the creation of a Soviet - Polish - Little Entente grouping,⁶³ but in the event the Soviet Government was to be disappointed. Erskine reported that Czech overtures to Poland, one of which envisaged the signing of a treaty of friendship, had all been ignored, Poland "preferring to go her own way."⁶⁴ The Polish Ambassador, Lukasiewicz, had informed Litvinov on March 23rd, that despite Polish opposition to the Four Power Pact, Poland would continue to treat the countries of the Little Entente as separate entities rather than as a bloc.⁶⁵ This Polish inflexibility

⁶¹ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V, No.58. Erskine to Simon, March 29th, 1933. See also, *ibid.*, No.67, for an account of Simon's conversation with the Polish Ambassador in London, on April 4th. R.E.Dell, the well-informed correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian", wrote: "The Poles were rightly furious at the attempt of the four great Western Powers to dominate Europe, and saw that the pact could deprive Poland of any effective voice in European affairs and ultimately be a menace to Polish independence." R.E.Dell, "The Geneva Racket, 1920-1939." (London, 1941) p.200.

⁶² B.B.Budurowycz, "Polish-Soviet Relations, 1932-1939", (London and New York, 1963), pp.30-31. Beck states that Pilsudski had, for a while, contemplated a move towards the Little Entente. Beck, "Final Report", pp.38-39.

⁶³ SP0, Vol.VI, No.17. Stomonyakov to Antonov-Ovseenko, April 19th, 1933.

⁶⁴ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V, No.206. Erskine to Simon, June 7th, 1933.

⁶⁵ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.90, p.183. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the Polish Envoy to the USSR, Lukasiewicz, March 23rd, 1933. See also *ibid.*, No.99.

dashed Soviet hopes that the neighbouring states would rally to the USSR in opposition to the Pact.

Possibly the most hostile reaction of all to the Four Power Pact, was that of the Soviet Union. Germany's participation in the negotiations did nothing to improve deteriorating Soviet-German relations, and repeated German assurances that the Pact would prove to be of relatively little significance, had little effect. Dirksen reported on April 4th:

In the conversation with M. Litvinov, it appeared that his scepticism regarding the possible outcome of the pending negotiations at the same time tempered his objections to the plan. It is to be expected that he will present his objections all the more strongly, the more prospects improve for a conclusion of the pact.⁶⁶

Litvinov suggested to Dirksen that the Soviet Union might wish to take part in the negotiations in the role of observer, a suggestion which evidently involved Soviet prestige as much as the desire to observe the proceedings. Litvinov's main objection was that:

The original purpose of the pact might be a limited one. But in political arrangements of this kind one never knew whether they would ultimately lead. It was quite possible that decisions would be taken that would adversely affect the Soviet Union.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.136, p.246. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, April 4th, 1933. Dirksen had previously been instructed to tell the Russians that they would be kept informed about the progress of the Pact negotiations. See, *ibid.*, No.121, pp.224-227. Neurath to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, March 27th, 1933. The German Government continued to express its doubts concerning the Pact to the Soviet Union. Moscow remained sceptical of the value of such German reassurances, especially those concerning the German desire to maintain good relations with the USSR. See, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.131, pp.256-259. Record of a Conversation of the Polpred and Trade Representative, USSR, in Germany, with State Secretary Bülow, April 22nd, 1933, and *ibid.*, No.167, pp.321-323. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with German Foreign Minister Neurath, May 29th, 1933.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, No.136, pp.244-245. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, April 4th, 1933.

In the Soviet account of the same conversations Litvinov criticised Mussolini's plan on the grounds that political questions should not be discussed by the four Powers to the exclusion of the others. He added:

No explanation can therefore remove our mistrust and that of other states, to a meeting of the Four. Our mistrust at present may grow, in view of our strained relations with Britain... we cannot remain indifferent to such meetings.⁶⁸

Germany was not the only country attempting to reassure the USSR of the innocuous nature of the proposed Pact. The French Ambassador, Count Francois Dejean, and his Chargé d' Affaires, Jean Payart, visited Litvinov, on April 10th, with this same intention. Dejean stated that "France's participation guaranteed the impossibility of any anti-Soviet decisions." Litvinov commented that the attitude of the French Government depended upon the political complexion of the party in office. The Soviet Government was, he said, particularly sensitive to the possibility of any treaty revision in the Baltic area.⁶⁹ Dejean reported that Litvinov had been anxious at the formation of a European directorate without Soviet participation, which he had believed could lead to the diversion of German revisionism to the East.⁷⁰

The Italian Ambassador, Bernado Attolico, had already informed Litvinov of Mussolini's proposals on March 31st.

⁶⁸ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.106, pp.210-213. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the German Ambassador to the USSR, Dirksen, April 3rd, 1933. This is the Soviet account of the conversations with Dirksen, upon which his report of April 4th is based.

⁶⁹ Ibid., No.114, pp.225-226. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the French Ambassador to the USSR, Dejean and his Chargé Payart, April 10th, 1933.

⁷⁰ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.III, No.115. Dejean to Paul-Boncour, April 11th, 1933.

Attolico "spoke at length of Mussolini's pact, attempting to prove the inoffensive character of this suggestion, which was aimed at guaranteeing peace. Attolico, therefore did not understand our negative attitude to the pact."⁷¹ An improvement in Soviet-Italian relations was to be one of the Pact's by-products. On May 28th, Mussolini informed the Soviet Ambassador in Italy, V. Potemkin, that he approved of the idea of a Soviet-Italian Treaty of Friendship, Non-aggression and Neutrality. Mussolini explained that one of the major effects of such a treaty would be "to eliminate the doubts and fears expressed in the USSR with regard to the Four Power Pact", which, he repeated, was not directed against the Soviet Union.⁷²

On April 11th, Litvinov instructed Dovgalevsky to inform Herriot of Russia's disapproval of the Pact. "Tell him", Litvinov said, "that we usually make our judgements according to the formula, without us - means against us."⁷³ The next day, Daladier and Dovgalevsky discussed the Pact in Paris. Daladier agreed with the Russian's negative comments, but explained that he could not simply reject the project. He claimed, however, that the French amendments had at least made it more acceptable to the Soviet Government.⁷⁴ Daladier concluded by denying the

⁷¹ DVP, Vol.XVI, Note 92, p.826.

⁷² Ibid., No.166, pp.316-321. Record of a Conversation of the Polpred USSR in Italy with Mussolini, May 28th, 1933. See also, Nos.230 and 270. For the text of the Soviet-Italian Pact, which was signed on September 2nd, 1933, see, No.277.

⁷³ Ibid., No.115, p.226-227. Telegram from the People's Commisar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in France, Dovgalevsky, April 11th, 1933. Herriot replied that in his opinion the Four Power Pact was doomed, though he sympathized with the Soviet attitude. Ibid., No.118, p.231.

⁷⁴ Daladier was correct in his assumption. On April 23rd, Litvinov had informed Dovgalevsky that "We are, as before, opposed to any version of the Four Power Pact, but we see the French version as the lesser evil." Ibid., Note 111, p.830.

possibility of a Franco - German rapprochement and welcoming the idea of a USSR - Little Entente Pact.⁷⁵

The initial, rather guarded criticism, which Litvinov had expressed to Dirksen, soon gave way to an increasingly hostile press campaign, as the Pact drew nearer to completion. The background of tension in the Far East, poor relations with Germany and the difficulties with Great Britain over the arrest of the Metropolitan - Vickers engineers and subsequent British embargo on trade with Russia, all combined to make the Pact much more menacing to the USSR than the evidence suggests. France seemed to be by no means anxious for closer relations with Russia, and had not yet ratified the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact of the previous November.⁷⁶

Given these threatening international factors, it is not too much to say, that the Four Power Pact, however inoffensive its final form, had a disproportionately great influence on the policies of the Soviet Union, and was responsible to a significant degree for the change in emphasis of Soviet foreign policy from reliance upon the German connection, to the policy of collective security. This change was naturally far from sudden, and Stalin always managed to keep both irons in the fire, though Soviet sources, with their penchant for retrospective simplification, date the adherence of the USSR to a policy of collective security from December 12th, 1933, when

⁷⁵ Ibid., No.116, p.227-228. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in France, Dovgalevsky, to the NKID USSR, April 12th 1933.

⁷⁶ The Soviet Government had shown some anxiety at the delay in the ratification of the Pact. On January 20th, 1933, Dovgalevsky had asked that the Pact be ratified as soon as possible. It was apparently his third such request. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.II, No.218. Note from the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Cot, January 20th, 1933.

"the Central Committee of the VKP (b) made the decision to commence the struggle for collective security in Europe."⁷⁷ As a study of the Soviet press shows, the situation in Europe was far too confused to allow the Kremlin to make such a swift and total reversal of its policy.

Hints of a conference, or meeting of the heads of state of the Western Powers had appeared in Izvestia as early as March 5th, with the mention of a five-Power Conference suggested by Great Britain. The likelihood of this actually taking place was, however, dismissed.⁷⁸ Two days later Izvestia reported von Papen's⁷⁹ visit to Geneva. He was known to harbour anti-Soviet sentiments and to favour a Franco-German rapprochement; so some apprehension was shown when Izvestia suggested that MacDonald, Simon and Daladier might join him for talks. These rumours were all connected with attempts, in particular those by MacDonald, to salvage something from the impending collapse of the Disarmament Conference, attempts which were treated with considerable sarcasm by the Soviet press.⁸⁰ But there seemed to be a certain nervousness about the intentions of the Western Powers.

The first mention of the Four Power Pact proposal as such, appeared in Izvestia on March 20th, in an article headed "Plans of the Anti-Soviet Bloc", which was composed of quotations from various foreign newspapers on "plans for the creation of a Four Power European Directorate", thus clearly indicating

⁷⁷ M.E.Airapetyan and G.A.Deborin, "Etapi vneshnei politiki SSSR", (Moscow, 1961), p.205.

⁷⁸ Izvestia, March 5th, 1933.

⁷⁹ Von Papen, Reich Commissar of Prussia until April 10th, 1933.

⁸⁰ See, Izvestia, March 17th and 18th, 1933.

Soviet hostility, even at this early stage of the Pact's existence. The next day Izvestia concentrated on the aspects of the first draft of the Pact which dealt with revision and equality of armaments for Germany. The writer noted a willingness to revise post-war treaties, which had given stability in Europe, a comment which already demonstrated a certain change in the Soviet attitude to the Versailles settlement. The article continued:

In other words Germany should be given the right to increase her armaments to a certain extent. In addition to this British circles are evidently inclined to permit a certain amount of border revision in specific cases.⁸¹

On the same day Pravda pointed out that the proposed Pact posed a threat to the Little Entente and Poland and Izvestia alleged that MacDonald saw the pact,

as an agreement of the four Powers under which only subsequently would other powers be given the honour of being invited in order to hear the opinion of their more powerful "benefactors."⁸²

The Soviet leadership had realised the potential effect of the Pact on the Little Entente and Poland, and was no doubt hoping to make some diplomatic capital out of an otherwise unsatisfactory situation: "The Soviet Union takes the position of the champion of justice around which the middle or small powers gather their strength."⁸³ This theme of the Soviet Union as the champion and the focal point of the small peace-loving states is one that was stressed throughout the period of the negotiations.

Another important theme in the Soviet criticism of the

⁸¹ Izvestia, March 21st, 1933. See also, Pravda, March 21st 1933.

⁸² Izvestia, March 22nd, 1933.

⁸³ Izvestia, March 27th, 1933.

Pact was the linking of the changing Soviet attitude to revision plans for the acquisition of "Lebensraum" in the East. Karl Radek⁸⁴ wrote in this vein in Izvestia in a long article entitled "Where is Germany going?":

It is unfortunate that in this year memories of Brest-Litovsk suggest themselves, for at the head of the German Republic are found people, who in their official organ recently wrote "Versailles must go, but Brest-Litovsk will live"... The National-Socialists are following a foreign policy programme directed against the existence of the USSR, with whom Germany remains in contractually based good neighbourly relations.⁸⁵

The Soviet press closely followed the various changes made to the original draft of the Four Power Pact, but its general attitude remained consistently hostile. Hopeful reports about the opposition of the Little Entente, Poland and certain section of French opinion often appeared, as did several reports on the impending breakdown of the negotiations, but Moscow evidently underestimated the skill of the western diplomats at playing charades.

German reassurances of goodwill towards the Soviet Union were in the press at least, regarded as insincere and the Four Power Pact began to loom large in the Soviet interpretation of German motives:

It is sufficient to reveal the fact that Hitler's government welcomed Mussolini's plan to decide the most important European questions with a consortium of four powers - Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France, and hoped that on this cooperation "would depend the fate of Europe" - evidently excluding the fate of Europe from those "important interests" which unite Germany and the USSR.⁸⁶

Despite Soviet-German tension, the extension of the Treaty of Berlin was ratified on May 5th,⁸⁷ but it is doubtful if this

⁸⁴ Karl Radek, journalist and Editor of Izvestia.

⁸⁵ Izvestia, March 23rd, 1933.

⁸⁶ Izvestia, March 28th, 1933.

⁸⁷ See, DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.212, p.385. German-Soviet mutual recriminations continued despite the ratification of the extension of the Treaty of Berlin. See, *ibid.*, No.245, p.449. Memorandum by Dirksen, May 16th, 1933.

action afforded much relief to the USSR, for the ratification was too long overdue to convince the Soviet leaders that it was anything more than a diplomatic placebo on Hitler's part. The Soviet press treated the extension of the Treaty of Berlin as one more manifestation of its peace policy and no longer as the mainstay of the Soviet Union's foreign relations:

The Berlin treaty will in the future be the basis of our policy in Europe, on a level with the non-aggression pacts concluded by the Soviet government with neighbouring powers. Friendly relations will produce a friendly response, hostile actions will correspondingly produce a rebuff.⁸⁸

This change in Soviet foreign policy from support of the revisionist Powers, principally Germany, to qualified support of the Versailles system, can be demonstrated quite clearly by comparing the main ideas expressed in a Soviet book "The Basis of the International Policy of Soviet Power" by N. Rudolf, which was published in May 1933, with the series of newspaper articles written by Radek in the same period. This book was reviewed by British Embassy staff in Moscow, and a summary was enclosed in a despatch from William Strang to Simon, on May 8th 1933.⁸⁹ The book sums up the essence of Russian foreign policy before Hitler's rise to power and the diplomatic confusion caused by the Four Power Pact:

In a word, the Soviet state is fundamentally hostile to all imperialist policy, and its international policy is completely free from aggression as regards other states... In the Far East, Japanese imperialism is quite openly preparing for war against the USSR... The USSR must take account of the conflict between

⁸⁸ Izvestia, May 6th 1933.

⁸⁹ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.487. Strang to Simon, May 8th 1933. The enclosure is not printed in this volume, but may be found in the Foreign Office Archives at the Public Record Office, (Hereinafter: PRO), PRO, FO371/17261, N3646/748/38. William Strang was Counsellor at the British Embassy in Moscow in 1933, having been Acting Counsellor since 1930.

Germany and the Entente and draw nearer to the former insofar as Germany herself refrains from entering the anti-Soviet "bloc" into which our enemies are urgently inviting her.⁹⁰

Radek's article in the Pravda of May 10th, headed "Revision of the Versailles Treaty", was the first explicit indication that the Soviet attitude to revision was undergoing a substantial change:

... the imperialists, who went bankrupt in the attempt to force upon the world the conditions of Versailles, have not been able to give the world new conditions of life fundamentally different from those of Versailles.⁹¹

Radek is thus at this stage not prepared to abandon attacks on the Versailles system, yet continues by demonstrating that any revision of this admittedly unsatisfactory system would lead to war, especially where Germany is concerned.

The best confirmation of this is the fact that it is the fascist governments which have become the flag-bearers of revision ...the governments which have developed the imperialist theory of the mastery of the white man over the coloured to the still more savage theory of the mastery of the mythical Nordic race over all other peoples... The mere fact that revision of the treaty is bound up with the victory of fascism shows how little this revision would be considered in the national interests of the masses of the nations designated by the fascists as "inferior"... The path of revision of the predatory, tormenting Versailles peace leads through a new world war. All attempts by interested parties to represent the matter of revision merely as a peaceful resettlement of old treaties cannot deceive anyone. The diplomatic talk concerning the revision of the Versailles Treaty is simply a means of preparing for war. The word "revision" is simply another name for a new world war. It is therefore not surprising that one of the basic demands of the revisionists is the demand for the right to those arms which are denied them by the Versailles Treaty.⁹²

This is a clear indication of the Soviet Government's extreme apprehension at the Four Power Pact and its mention

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Pravda, May 10th 1933.

⁹² Ibid.

of revision; while continuing to condemn the Treaty of Versailles in the familiar fashion Radek, speaking for his political superiors, emphasised that any revision of the Versailles settlement would lead to a still more threatening situation. The fact that the four Western Powers, to the exclusion of the USSR, were negotiating to conclude a "Political Pact of Understanding and Cooperation" between themselves, a pact which failed even to mention the League of Nations in its first article, which included a hint of possible Great Power coercion in the last phrase,⁹³ and above all which contained the mention of German equality of armaments and the "revision of peace treaties", meant that the Four Power Pact threatened the whole basis of Soviet foreign policy with regard to Europe. Although France had been striving, with considerable success, to nullify the clauses which were offensive to her allies, the situation for the Soviet Union remained the same. Germany, the USSR's erstwhile ally, whose leaders had spoken and acted in an explicitly anti-Soviet manner, had been invited into a political combination with Italy, France and the Soviet Union's arch enemy of the moment, Great Britain.

Radek continued with some verbal manipulation about the Versailles Treaty, which he said could only be replaced satisfactorily by the victory of the proletarian revolution which would replace Versailles "by peace treaties based on national self-determination." "But", he stated "this will be a socialist version." Radek was paying lip-service to the, by this time moribund, idea of a proletarian revolution which would take place should the "new imperialist war" break out.

⁹³ See Appendix No.2. These provisions were subsequently modified at the insistence of the French.

For this reason the imperialists were hoping to settle their own quarrels at the expense of the USSR:

This programme of seeking the revision of the Versailles Treaty on the lines of re-establishing the still worse Brest peace is the foreign policy programme of German Fascism.

The article ended with a threat to those who may try to attack the Soviet Union, which was in itself, both a threat, and an affirmation of the USSR's absolute neutrality, and thus the beginning of the Soviet move to the anti-revisionist camp:

The Soviet Union does not take part in the common squabbles of the capitalist groupings. But any attempt to turn matters against it would place on the agenda not the question of our position vis-à-vis the Versailles peace or the attempts by the other imperialist powers to alter it, but the entire question of the existence of capitalism in general.⁹⁴

Soviet relations with Great Britain since March had been far from satisfactory because of the arrest of the Metropolitan Vickers engineers on March 12th, an event "which threw the whole subject of Anglo-Soviet relations into the melting-pot and seemed at the time to endanger the very existence of Anglo-Soviet trading and diplomatic relations."⁹⁵ The British Government, reacted to these arrests by placing an embargo on 80% of Soviet imports, which prompted the USSR to retaliate in a similar manner. This deterioration of relations between the two countries prompted the Soviet press to publish some virulent attacks on Great Britain. An article by Radek even traced the idea of the Four Power Pact back to the First World War, where Britain was "once again" the inspirer of such an

⁹⁴ Pravda, May 10th 1933.

⁹⁵ W.P. and Z.K. Coates, "A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations", (London, 1945), Vol.I, pp.469-470. For details of the arrest, trial and subsequent release of the British engineers, see, DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, Chapters IV, V and VI. See also, DVP, Vol.XVI, Nos. 117, 127, 129, 132, 176, 195, 198, 206, 212, 216 and 241.

anti-Soviet combination, "it was a fact that even during the world war English imperialism was thinking of a "pact of four powers against Russia".⁹⁶ Great Britain was seen as a consistent factor behind plans to direct German imperialism against the Soviet Union and one of several explicit accusations to this effect appeared shortly after another revised draft of the Pact had been produced:

British imperialism, the inspirer and organiser of the pact, already during the first Rome negotiations showed its desire to sacrifice the interest of several European states with the aim of partially satisfying the claims of German fascism, in order in the last analysis to turn the edge of the pact against the USSR.⁹⁷

Franco-Soviet relations at this time were marred by the French participation in the negotiations for the Four Power Pact. Although French attempts to emasculate the Pact were reported with approval in the Soviet press, contempt was shown for her supposed subservience to Great Britain and hostility to her commitment to a pact "the basic content of which concerns the possibility of the revision of treaties."⁹⁸ France was reported to be attempting to take the middle course "between the wish to placate her allies and the wish to avoid isolation from England."⁹⁹ Nor, claimed Izvestia, did the French draft of the Pact, despite its more moderate wording, deceive the Soviet people:

The public opinion of the Soviet Union... does not believe in the heated protestations and declarations. It knows that all capitalist powers show hostility to its social system. When they gather together to form a trust for the creation of a political deal, then the people of the USSR must realise that in the commercial world, those with any skill try to compensate for losses in one sphere by gains in another.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Izvestia, May 18th 1933.

⁹⁷ Pravda, May 23rd 1933.

⁹⁸ Izvestia, May 23rd 1933.

⁹⁹ Izvestia, June 2nd 1933.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Britain, France, Italy and Germany initialled the Pact on June 7th 1933.¹⁰¹ The wording of the French Cabinet statement, which was published in Izvestia, closely resembled those used by the Soviet press on the occasion of the renewal of the Treaty of Berlin, and as such can have given little reassurance to Moscow which saw the Franco-Soviet link as the best potential means of containing German expansion:

The new pact, concluded together with the Franco-Soviet pact and the Franco-Turkish treaty of friendship, emphasises France's wish to cooperate in the bringing about of European peace.¹⁰²

However, the majority of the hostile comment concerned with the Pact was reserved for Great Britain. The Pact was supposed to be basically anti-Soviet in intention, "a creation of the 'gods' of British diplomacy", and the British trade embargo merely a prelude to intervention against the Soviet Union.¹⁰³ On June 4th, Strang gave an astute appraisal of the turn in Soviet foreign policy:

It has been evident for some time that the active imperialist policy of Japan and the Fascist revolution in Germany have together played a decisive part in re-orienting the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

These events, he said, also explained the series of non-aggression pacts to secure the Soviet Union's Western frontier, and the Soviet circumspection in the Far East where the Soviet Union had decided to sell the Chinese Eastern Railway rather than become involved in open warfare.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ See, DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V, No.204. Simon to Graham, June 7th 1933.

¹⁰² Izvestia, June 9th 1933.

¹⁰³ Pravda, June 1st 1933. Strang reported that this article "for sheer silliness cannot often have been surpassed, even in the Soviet press." DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.500. Strang to Simon, June 4th 1933.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ For details of this complicated transaction, see, Moore, "Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1931-1945", pp.24-47.

Not all Soviet press attacks on Great Britain were quite as straightforward. On June 2nd, Izvestia carried an article which alleged that the plan of the British "diehards" consisted of,

inciting Japanese imperialism to attack the USSR, which will bring in other capitalist states. Thus the unified front, which cannot be created by diplomatic means, will be more easily brought into being under the pressure of military necessity.¹⁰⁶

It is difficult to estimate exactly how real Moscow felt this threat of intervention to be. Strang was probably correct to say that he felt that the threat probably reflected the apprehensions rather than the convictions of the Soviet government.¹⁰⁷

Once the Four Power Pact had been initialled,¹⁰⁸ Radek was called upon to summarize its aims and achievements, which he did with his characteristic comprehensiveness and exaggeration. He described the Pact as an attempt to divert attention from the failure of the Disarmament Conference, and from the probable failure of the World Economic Conference in London:

¹⁰⁶ Izvestia, June 2nd 1933.

¹⁰⁷ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.500. Strang to Simon, June 4th 1933. Strang continued, "it suits their book, for external as well as internal purposes, to spread the doctrine that the Soviet Union is the object of organised international victimisation, and this doctrine, which is not distasteful to foreign "soi-disant" pacifist circles creates a favourable atmosphere for the reception of M.Litvinov's "peace talk" in international tribunes....The Four-Power Pact, therefore, whatever its final form, will remain a manifestation of the system of anti-Soviet blocs which British imperialism is trying to create in Europe and outside Europe."

¹⁰⁸ President Roosevelt described the initialling of the Pact as "a good augury." He continued, "The United States welcomes every effort toward replacing conflicting national aims by international cooperation for the greater advantage of all. This agreement of the principal European Powers to work closely together for the preservation of peace should give renewed courage to all who are striving for the success of the Geneva and London Conferences." FRUS, 1933, Vol.I, p.416.

The Disarmament Conference is at a standstill. This fact must be covered up and concealed. The Four Power Pact serves this end. If the economic conference ends in failure, then this means a worsening of the crisis. The Four Power Pact must create conditions under which the conference does not become a free for all....German imperialism proposed to the capitalist powers of Europe the creation of a Holy Alliance against the USSR and the colonial nations as a concession made by it primarily at the expense of its eastern and south-eastern neighbours.¹⁰⁹

The pact was thus a means for attacking the USSR and also of presenting a united front against the USA at the economic conference. As regards the question of revision, which had been one of the principal tasks of the Pact to solve, Radek had this to say:

The problem of the revision of the Versailles Treaty raised so sharply by Germany has neither been grasped nor decided. The Four Power Pact is the objective means, with the help of which the European imperialist powers are attempting with secondary and formal concessions to placate Germany and include her in the "United Front".¹¹⁰

Radek concluded his article by mocking the Pact and its exclusion of the USSR from the affairs of Europe:

Attempts to leave out of account in European decisions a power with a population of 165 million, with a huge industry, a power in sympathy with all that is best in mankind, are laughable. They show only that the so-called Western Powers overestimate their strength by the extent to which they underestimate the strength of the USSR and that such a mistake is fraught with unpleasant consequences for them. Public opinion notes this attempt to move the borders of Europe to the Urals from the Berezina, and evaluates it accordingly.¹¹¹

The World Economic Conference which met in London in June and July 1933 would, it was hoped, lead to a solution of the world's economic problems by discussing them round a table. Unlike the negotiations for the Four Power Pact, the

¹⁰⁹ Izvestia, June 10th 1933.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Soviet Union had been invited to participate, an opportunity which Litvinov used to revive the Soviet proposal for a Pact of Economic Non-Aggression¹¹² which had been first put forward at the Commission of Enquiry for European Union in 1931.¹¹³ The revival of this suggestion was almost certainly prompted by the British embargo on trade with the USSR which had been imposed as a reprisal for the imprisonment of the Metropolitan-Vickers engineers. Not unexpectedly the Soviet proposal was largely ignored by the other participants in the Conference.¹¹⁴ In fact the Conference itself was notable only for its failure to adopt any remedy for the parlous state of the world's economy:

...practically every solution, however inadequate and partial, suggested by any of the delegates for any one of the problems facing the Conference, was objected to by other delegates as being contrary to their national interests.¹¹⁵

Maisky felt the Conference was doomed from the start:

The universal crisis of capitalism aggravated by the world economic crisis 1929-33 did its destructive work and undermined the ground beneath the feet of the Conference beforehand.¹¹⁶

He commented upon the final "adjournment" of the Conference with his usual pungency:

The whole work of the conference has been deeply penetrated by one fundamental mood, one aspiration "adjournment" - to adjourn the adoption of any serious or binding decisions on those problems.¹¹⁷

¹¹² See, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.187, for the text of Litvinov's speech.

¹¹³ See, Degras, Vol.II, p.500.

¹¹⁴ Only Turkey, Poland and the Irish Free State supported Litvinov's proposal.

¹¹⁵ Coates, "A History of Anglo-Soviet Relations", Vol.I, p.507.

¹¹⁶ I.M.Maisky, "Vospominaniya sovetskogo posla", (Moscow, 1966), Vol.II, p.216.

¹¹⁷ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.259, p.468. Speech of member of the Soviet delegation I.M. Maisky at the plenary session of the World Economic Conference, July 27th 1933.

But the most startling and unsettling event of the Conference, from the Soviet point of view, was the memorandum¹¹⁸ handed to the press by the German delegate Hugenberg.¹¹⁹ The essence of this document was that Germany, as a 'Volk ohne Raum', required not only the return of her African colonies, but urgently needed to annex other areas (the Ukraine was implied, though not mentioned by name.) Hugenberg took this action without Hitler's prior approval, and shortly afterwards he was recalled and his memorandum disowned by the German Government. For Moscow this was not sufficient:

... disowning a minister does not get rid of the fact that the memorandum was presented, showing that the ideas set forth in it are still being churned over in the Government quarters.¹²⁰

Krestinsky protested to Dirksen on June 19th 1933, that the memorandum had obviously been directed against the USSR and that "In spite of friendly statements by authoritative Germans, the Soviet Government could not but fear that the German Government had espoused the Rosenberg ideas."¹²¹ In his report Dirksen spoke of the "great alarm, indignation and uncertainty" in Moscow.¹²²

At the Economic Conference on June 17th, Litvinov spoke

¹¹⁸ For the text of this memorandum, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.312, pp.562-567.

¹¹⁹ Alfred Hugenberg, German Minister of Public Economy and Agriculture and veteran leader of the German Nationalist Party. He "resigned" on June 27th, more for internal political reasons than because of his memorandum. See also, DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.338, pp.607-608.

¹²⁰ Degras, Vol.III, p.56. Litvinov to Central Executive Committee, December 29th 1933. See also, Pravda, June 19th and July 5th 1933, for Soviet criticism of the memorandum.

¹²¹ Alfred Rosenberg, Head of the Aussenpolitisches Amt of the Nazi Party, editor-in-chief, Völkischer Beobachter and exponent of Nazi racist mythology, especially concerning settlement in the East.

¹²² DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.325, p.582. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, June 19th 1933. See also, Dirksen, "Moscow, Tokyo, London", pp.114-115. Dirksen was a keen advocate of a close Soviet-German relationship.

of the German memorandum with some irony,¹²³ but in Berlin the Soviet Ambassador handed a formal protest to State Secretary Bülow on June 22nd.¹²⁴ Bülow had already instructed Dirksen to explain in Moscow that the memorandum had not been directed against Russia, nor had there been any change in German policy towards the USSR.¹²⁵ He told Khinchuk that the Soviet reactions were absurd and on June 29th, the German Government rejected the protest.¹²⁶

The effect of the failure of the World Economic Conference and the Hugenberg memorandum was to add to the Soviet fears of a general capitalist coalition directed against the USSR which had already been raised by the Four Power Pact. "Almost simultaneously the Four Power Pact and the World Economic Conference seemed to fling Russia back into the isolation she had been in since 1920."¹²⁷

It is difficult to decide exactly how much, if any, of their own propaganda Soviet decision-makers actually believed. This can only really be gauged by studying their subsequent actions in the international arena. The situation which confronted Moscow was evidently far from being as clear-cut as a reading of Pravda or Izvestia might indicate, for Russia was being forced to radically reconstruct the whole basis of her foreign relations. The Treaty of Versailles had, up to 1933, been a convenient target for Soviet attacks, both because

¹²³ Degras, Vol.III, pp.21-22.

¹²⁴ DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.331, pp.590-591. Memorandum by the State Secretary, June 22nd 1933.

¹²⁵ Ibid., No.327, p.585. Bülow to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, June 20th 1933.

¹²⁶ Ibid., No.331, p.591 n.

¹²⁷ J.Grunewald, "L'évolution des relations Germano-Soviétiques de 1933 à 1936", J.Duroselle, "Les Relations Germano-Soviétiques 1933-1939", (Paris, 1954), p.21.

of Russia's loss of her Western territories and as a means of earning the support of those nations which had suffered in a similar manner.¹²⁸ However, now that the four Western Powers had concluded an agreement which specifically mentioned the possibility of the revision of existing peace treaties, the Soviet Government was forced to re-examine its position. Revision no longer seemed such an attractive prospect to Moscow, now that Germany was in the hands of leaders who advocated aggressive expansion in the East, and whose clandestine rearmament the democracies seemed almost to be encouraging by the inclusion of Germany in the Four Power Pact. The Soviet authorities, by virtue of the once close military links with Germany,¹²⁹ knew what German's military potential was, and had reason to fear, if not immediately, if this potential was allowed to develop unchecked.¹³⁰

It was, however, the Four Power Pact which irrevocably upset the diplomatic balance in Europe and forced all the European Powers, and the Soviet Union in particular, to reassess their international relationships:

If Mussolini's aim had been to calm Europe's nerves, he achieved the very opposite result. The pact served as a catalyst for crystallizing the opposition for voicing the fears and anxieties which had risen with Hitler's accession to power. In some cases it initiated profound changes, in others it reinforced existing prejudices.¹³¹

¹²⁸ The Soviet-German, and Soviet-Turkish relationships owed much to mutual hostility towards the Versailles system.

¹²⁹ See, F.L.Carsten, "The Reichswehr and the Red Army, 1920-1933", Survey No.44/45, pp.114-132. Carsten feels it is more likely that the initiative to end the military cooperation came from the Germans, rather than from the Russians. Hilger believes that the Russians ended the arrangement. G.Hilger and A.G.Meyer, "The Incompatible Allies" (New York, 1953), p.257. Dirksen agrees with him. Dirksen, "Moscow, Tokyo, London", p.112.

¹³⁰ Soviet sources were not the only ones to exaggerate the threat to the USSR in 1933: "The Soviet Union had never been so perilously exposed to the threat of foreign aggression at any time since the evacuation of the Crimea by General Wrangel in December 1921 and the evacuation of Vladivostock by the Japanese in October 1922". Survey, 1933 p.179.

¹³¹ Jarausch, "The Four Power Pact", pp.109-110.

diplomatic front was the signing in London, on July 3rd 1933, of a Convention Defining the Aggressor.¹³² The signatories were Afghanistan, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Roumania, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Iran and the USSR.

This convention seems to have been as much a propaganda exercise, as a piece of practical diplomacy. When set beside the Four Power Pact, the Soviet press could demonstrate the contrast between its own policies and the warlike anti-Soviet nature of the capitalist Powers.¹³³

As in Geneva, so in London the Soviet delegation placed all the states before a fence which has to be jumped. If they do not do this, they will have to demonstrate their bankruptcy.¹³⁴

The reaction of the smaller states had disappointed the Soviet Government, which had hoped for a rapprochement leading to a possible non-aggression pact with the Little Entente Powers. The Convention defining the Aggressor was the only tangible result of what was no more than a temporary identity of interests.¹³⁵ Poland in fact soon began a diplomatic flirtation with Germany which led to the Polish-German non-aggression pact of January 26th 1934.

More important than this minor diplomatic success was the change in the Soviet attitude to revision, a change which had been implicit in Radek's Pravda article of May 10th, but which had now become more explicit:

¹³² For the text of this Convention, see, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.220.

¹³³ See, Trukhanovsky "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR", p.297. It is interesting to note that Moscow took care to explain to Mussolini that the Convention was not intended to counteract his Four Power Pact, but was purely a measure to guarantee general peace. DVP, Vol.XVI, No.227, p.424. Telegram from the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in Italy Potemkin, July 9th 1933. See also, *ibid.*, Nos. 405 and 419.

¹³⁴ Izvestia, June 18th 1933.

¹³⁵ The only other evidence of a minor improvement in Polish-Soviet relations in this period was the signing of a convention for the investigation and regulation of border incidents, on June 3rd, and a customs agreement on September 18th. SPO, Vol.VI, Nos.25 and 61.

The Versailles Treaty cannot be a basis for good relations between nations, but the peace which would be foisted upon humanity by the victorious Fascist vikings would undoubtedly be still worse than the situation which at present exists. Furthermore, such a peace would cost humanity a war.¹³⁶

This is a clear indication that the Soviet Union had moved towards a position supporting the status quo, though as yet not to the next logical step of aligning herself by treaty with the Powers who desired to maintain the existing European system. This hesitation was in part due to France's temporary espousal of the Four Power Pact, as France was Russia's only conceivable continental ally against any threat from Germany. For Moscow, the German relationship was now a thing of the past, and although sporadic attempts were made by the Soviet Union to improve political relations, 1933 to all intents and purposes marked the end of Russia's Rapallo era. Answering his own question "Are we for Versailles or Rapallo?", Radek said:

We are for Rapallo - i.e. relations between Germany and the Soviet Union based on mutual profit and not directed against a third party. We are against Versailles, but not for a new Versailles which in the past the Ludendorffs endeavoured to establish at Brest-Litovsk, and which is now being propagated by certain sections of a press subsidised by government money.¹³⁷

The cooling of Franco-Soviet relations caused by the Four Power Pact¹³⁸ proved to be temporary, for even before Herriot's visit, steps had been taken by the French to improve the situation. On April 8th 1933 two French military attachés had arrived in Moscow, and one month later a Soviet attaché had arrived in Paris.¹³⁹ On May 20th, Litvinov sent Paul-Boncour

¹³⁶ Izvestia, August 6th 1933.

¹³⁷ Izvestia, September 3rd 1933.

¹³⁸ "The agreement of the four Western Powers marked the departure of French diplomacy from the path of rapprochement with the USSR. In addition to this it complicated France's relations with Poland and the Little Entente, and gravely damaged the whole French system of alliances in Europe, and cast suspicion on obligations and agreements which bore the signatures of representatives of the French Republic." Borisov, "Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya" p.185.

¹³⁹ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.III, No.390. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, June 14th 1933.

a telegram expressing his government's satisfaction at the unanimous vote in the Chamber in favour of the ratification of the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact. "This gesture", Litvinov stated, "has considerably added to the value of the pact, the importance of which has increased since its conception and signature."¹⁴⁰

Paul-Boncour repeated previous assurances of the in-offensive nature of the Four Power Pact in a conversation with Dovgalevsky, on June 13th:

Yesterday Boncour called me, and on the instructions of the Government assured me that the Four Power Pact in its present form, neither affected the USSR, nor envisaged the discussion or decision by participants in the pact, of questions involving the interests of the USSR.¹⁴¹

On July 6th Boncour told Litvinov that "the Four Power Pact was for France of interest only as a means of rapprochement with Italy."¹⁴² A further sign of improved Franco-Soviet relations was the arrival in Moscow, on June 14th, of Charles Alphant, the new French Ambassador.¹⁴³ Alphant was Herriot's former "chef de cabinet" and had been one of the authors of the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact. Alphant noted the very cordial atmosphere of his meeting with Molotov on July 15th. Molotov expressed the hope that commercial relations would flourish and assured Alphant that "the widest facilities

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., No.300. Litvinov to Paul-Boncour, May 20th 1933.

¹⁴¹ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.180, pp.349-350. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in France Dovgalevsky to the NKID USSR, June 14th 1933.

¹⁴² Ibid., No.222, p.417. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the NKID USSR, from Paris, July 6th 1933. Litvinov was in Paris on his way home from the Economic Conference in London.

¹⁴³ See, Ibid., No.177, pp.341-2. Alphant had been appointed on March 13th 1933.

would be given to our military attachés." ¹⁴⁴ The visits of Herriot and Air Minister Pierre Cot to Russia, ¹⁴⁵ in August and September respectively, were evidence of a new relationship between France and the Soviet Union. As Payart wrote on June 2nd, "The (Soviet) Union...seems to have in fact become the very negative pole of our policy." ¹⁴⁶ Soon the two countries became engaged in the prolonged negotiations concerning the proposed Eastern Locarno and Soviet membership of the League of Nations.

Russia was also anxious to improve her relations with Great Britain now that the trade embargo had been lifted. Litvinov spoke in this vein to Strang on September 29th, saying that "he could only wish that relations with Great Britain might acquire the stability which had always characterised, for example, Soviet relations with Italy." ¹⁴⁷ A report from Lord Chilston, the British Ambassador, on December 30th pointed to the increasing probability of a Franco-Soviet treaty of mutual assistance and noted the change in the Soviet

¹⁴⁴ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.III, No.488. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, July 15th 1933.

¹⁴⁵ For details of the Herriot and Cot visits, see, *ibid.*, Vol.IV, Nos.195, 204 and 308. Edward Coote, a First Secretary at the Foreign Office, described Herriot's visit as possibly "the most successful propaganda turn which the Soviet (sic) have ever staged." Minute by Coote, September 12th 1933, PRO, FO371/17261, N6877/748/38.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol.III, No.353, Payart to Paul-Boncour, June 2nd 1933.

¹⁴⁷ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.539. Strang to Simon, October 5th 1933. Litvinov's words were seen as a possible hint that the USSR wanted a non-aggression pact with Great Britain.

attitude to the League of Nations in Molotov's speech of December 29th 1933.¹⁴⁸

In Anglo-Russian commercial talks Litvinov had hinted at the possibility of the Soviet Union participating in an extended version of the Four Power Pact, or in a reconstructed League of Nations.¹⁴⁹ There can be no doubt that this increased diplomatic activity on the part of the Soviet Union, marked a significant change of policy, which was brought about by Soviet exclusion from the Four Power Pact and which led to the Russian "return to Europe."¹⁵⁰

But before this new Soviet re-orientation became a reality, there was a period of what might be called suspicious neutrality. This was the burden of Radek's article in Izvestia on December 16th 1933. While stressing the usual Soviet desire for peace, Radek explained that,

The Soviet Union is confronted both in Europe and the Far East with hostile camps that are preparing war against one another. It holds towards them a position of neutrality, and endeavours to guarantee its own peace by a policy of non-interference in their affairs and by entering into mutual obligations of non-aggression with all sides.

Radek quoted Stalin at the XVI Congress of the CPSU:

¹⁴⁸ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.548. Chilston to Simon, December 30th 1933. Shone minuted on this "the Soviet Government are clearly anxious for admission to the councils of the Great Powers on terms of full equality which they feel is still denied them (e.g. by their exclusion from the Four Power Pact)." PRO., FO371/17244, N1/1/38. T.A.Shone, a 1st Secretary at the Foreign Office.

¹⁴⁹ Chilston to Simon, December 18th 1933. PRO.,FO371/17262, N1935/748/38. (DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VII, No.545). Chilston made the following revealing comment. "It is interesting to observe how the general policy of the Soviet rulers appears now to be turning towards nationalism, almost as great a nationalism as in Tsarist days, rather than to internationalism." Usually this transition is put at much later date.

¹⁵⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, "Munich: Prologue to Tragedy", p.276.

"We do not want a single bit of foreign land, but at the same time not an inch of our land shall ever be yielded to anyone else" - these words are the exact expression of the policy of the Soviet Union.... A situation might arise when the Soviet Union would take action parallel with the enemy of its own enemy, or would even cooperate with them in a joint action. This solution remains today one of the guiding principles of Soviet policy.¹⁵¹

This period of neutrality gradually changed into one in which Moscow adopted a more positive attitude to those nations whose interests involved taking a strong line against Nazi Germany, of which France was in the forefront. This change was not a rapid process for it took over a year before the USSR became a member of the League of Nations, and the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact did not make its appearance until May 1935. However, the Four Power Pact, as a reaction to Hitler's accession to power, set amidst a threatening international situation, made the Soviet Government realise the vulnerability of its position. One of its most pressing tasks was therefore to "avert the old bugbear of a general capitalist coalition against the Soviet Union",¹⁵² and to prevent the Japanese and German threats from combining forces. Hence the Soviet caution in the Far East, and the reluctance to act hastily in Europe with regard to Germany, despite the almost daily anti-Soviet provocations in that country. The Four Power Pact was in many ways a demonstration of the lack of resolution of the Western Powers in the face of the German threat, yet its subsequent fate showed Moscow that there remained the possibility of carrying out a successful diplomatic readjustment by moving closer to France.

¹⁵¹ Izvestia, December 16th 1933. For Stalin's speech at the XVI Congress of the CPSU, See, J.V.Stalin, "Works" Vol.12, pp.242-269.

¹⁵² M.Beloff, "The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1929-1941", (London, 1947), Vol.I, p.90.

As for the Pact itself, the prolonged negotiations and compromises involved eventually resulted in the almost total emasculation of the Pact as a possible instrument of action.¹⁵³ France, fearing to lose her influence over her allies in Central and Eastern Europe¹⁵⁴ had secured the elimination from the text of all references to the possibility of treaty revision (apart from a reference to Article 19 of the Covenant) and to equality of German armaments.¹⁵⁵ On the very day when the Pact was initialled France sent notes to the Little Entente Powers and Poland, reassuring them that the question of treaty revision outside the rules fixed by Article 19 of the League Covenant, simply did not arise, and that unanimity would in any case be an essential prerequisite.¹⁵⁶

The Pact was never ratified and Hitler's actions a few months later in leaving the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations, revealed its ineffectiveness:

¹⁵³ "The Four Power Pact came to assume a shape in which it was acceptable to everybody because it had been purged of just those elements that had been the essence of it in the original Italian conception." Survey, 1933, p.211. Mussolini told Hassell, the German Ambassador to Italy, that "his proposal had been a boy at first, the English now wanted to make a hermaphrodite out of it and in the hands of the French it would become a girl." DGFP, Series C, Vol.I, No.135, p.244. Hassell to the Foreign Ministry, April 4th 1933.

¹⁵⁴ An account of Roumania's role in persuading France to secure amendments to the Pact can be found in, I.M.Oprea, "Nicolae Titulescu's Diplomatic Activity", (Bucharest, 1968) pp.116-119.

¹⁵⁵ See Appendix No.2.

¹⁵⁶ The British Ambassador to France Lord Tyrrell, told Léger, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that it seemed "unfortunate from the psychological point of view that the communications should synchronise with the initialling of the Pact." DBFP, Series 2, Vol.V, No.178. Tyrrell to Simon, May 29th 1933. See also, E.Cameron, "Alexis Saint-Léger Léger", in Craig and Gilbert, "The Diplomats" p.384.

Measured against its expressed goals, the failure of the Four Power Pact was so complete that one wonders not so much that it never became effective, but that it was signed at all. It failed to stem the division of Europe into two opposing camps. It failed to revise the peace treaties. It failed to secure Germany equality and to channel her re-armament. It failed to prevent the breakdown of the World Economic Conference. It failed to solve the perennial Danubian problem. But most of all, it failed to halt Hitler's withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League.¹⁵⁷

No matter how complete the failure of the Pact, the Soviet Government continued to be haunted by the fear of the creation of a similar anti-Soviet coalition of the Western Powers,¹⁵⁸ and saw such an alignment as being virtually implicit in the policy of appeasement followed by the Western democracies. Recent Soviet historiography maintains a hostile attitude to the Pact:

The Four Power Pact was supposed to serve only as an excuse for refusing to create a united front against aggression, and even to stimulate it. The project envisaged the full liberation of Germany from the stipulations of the post-war treaties; it would give her the right to arm for offence, as well as for defence....By concluding the Four Power Pact the imperialists of England and France sought to strengthen the maintenance of their interests and to direct the aggression of Fascist Germany and Italy against the USSR. However, the Four Power Pact was a failure. Through the active participation of Soviet diplomats the plans of the imperialists were foiled.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Jarasch, "The Four Power Pact", pp.219-220.

¹⁵⁸ On October 3rd 1933, Alphonse reported from Moscow that he sensed Litvinov's persistent fear that the Four Power Pact might be directed against the USSR. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.IV, No.268. Alphonse to Paul-Boncour, October 3rd 1933.

¹⁵⁹ KPSS. Vysshaya partinaya shkola, "Mezhdunarodnie otnosheniya i vneshnyaya politika SSSR, 1917-1960", (Moscow, 1961), p.294. The author of this quotation seems to have ignored the fact that in 1933, Soviet relations with Italy were very satisfactory.

This last point is quite untrue. The failure of the Pact was more the result of the incompatibility of the attitudes of the participants than of any putative Soviet diplomatic activity, as another source grudgingly acknowledges:

Imperialist contradictions, the harsh criticism of the pact by progressive society, and finally the active struggle of the USSR for peace and security in Europe, hampered the ratification of the pact.¹⁶⁰

The Four Power Pact, like the fear of foreign military intervention became one of Moscow's constant preoccupations, and the phrase "Four Power Pact" appeared in the Soviet press whenever it seemed remotely possible that the four Western Powers might combine in some action or agreement to the exclusion of the USSR. Indeed Soviet suspicion of the re-creation of such an alignment was at least one of the reasons for the prolonged Russian participation in the Non-Intervention Committee,¹⁶¹ during the Spanish Civil War. All the worst fears and suspicions of the Soviet Government were to be confirmed when the USSR was excluded from the deliberations preceeding the Munich Agreement of September 30th 1938. The Four Power Pact is thus usually seen in the USSR as a dress rehearsal for Munich:

This Pact was the prototype of the Munich agreement of 1938 and signified the agreement of the British and French Governments with German and Italian Fascism, and their refusal to create a united front against aggression.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Trukhanovsky, "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR, 1917-1939", Vol.I, p.296.

¹⁶¹ See below, Chapters V and VI.

¹⁶² I.F.Ivashin, "Ocherki istorii vneshnei politiki SSSR", (Moscow, 1958), p.223. Potemkin told Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, on September 29th 1938 that "What was happening now was the rebirth of the "notorious" Four Power Pact, which wanted to force its will on Europe, and whose first appearance he had witnessed - several years ago in Rome." DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.667, pp.998-999. Memorandum by Schulenburg, September 29th 1938.

The Pact is also held to mark "the origin of the policy of appeasement of the Fascist aggressors."¹⁶³ Had Munich not taken place five years later, it seems unlikely that the Four Power Pact would have been remembered as anything other than one more unsuccessful attempt to solve the international problems of the 1930s. The real significance of the Pact lay not in its similarity to Munich but in the long term effects it had on Soviet foreign policy. To the accompaniment of a barrage of hostile press comment and propaganda, Moscow began to revise its attitudes to the Versailles settlement and the League of Nations, and took the first steps towards the adoption of the policy of collective security which dominated the Soviet conduct of its international affairs until August 23rd 1939.

¹⁶³ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", p.587.

Chapter III. The Soviet decision to join the League of Nations, 1933-1934, and Soviet reactions to the Stresa Conference, 1935.

In the period 1934 to 1935, the transition of Soviet foreign policy, which had begun in 1933, continued under the impetus of German hostility and Japanese military activity on the borders of the Soviet Far East and in China. The period marked the increasingly urgent desire on the part of the Soviet Union to be accepted as an equal power in any efforts to contain the aggressive states. This in turn involved a reversal of previous Soviet attitudes towards international organisations; a reversal which involved the USSR in the prolonged negotiations aimed at the creation of an Eastern security pact on the lines of the Locarno Agreements, the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact and the Soviet decision to become a member of the much reviled League of Nations. Yet at Stresa, in April 1935, the Soviet Union was excluded from an international gathering concerned with European security. This was an indication that despite Russia's new found respectability and incessant calls for collective security, she was by no means automatically invited to international meetings taking place outside the League.

Stalin's evaluation of the international situation at the XVII Party Congress on January 26th 1934, emphasised the independence of Soviet foreign policy, an independence based on the growing economic and military strength of the USSR. He denied that the Soviet Union had changed its attitude to Versailles or was undertaking any new orientation in its foreign policy:

We never had any orientation towards Germany, nor have we any orientation towards Poland and France. Our orientation in the past and our orientation at

the present time is towards the USSR, and towards the USSR alone....And if the interests of the USSR demand rapprochement with one country or another which is not interested in disturbing peace, we adopt this course without hesitation.¹

But Stalin was protesting too much. Radek's articles concerning the Four Power Pact had clearly indicated a change in the Soviet approach, both to Germany and the Versailles system. Radek continued to fly the kite of collective resistance in the Soviet press. On January 1st 1934, after a survey of the deteriorating international situation, he concluded:

The point now is that wherever war breaks out it will be a world war and will involve all Powers. Only one thing is now possible, either to coordinate all action in order to prevent the outbreak of war, or to allow an avalanche to form which no one will be able to resist.²

Litvinov's speech of December 29th 1933 had had a somewhat similar intention. He claimed that the USSR had,

never refused participation in organised international co-operation having as its purpose the strengthening of peace...not being doctrinaires we do not refuse to make use of any kind of international combination or organisation now existing, or in future to be formed, if we have grounds to count on their serving the cause of peace.³

Further public evidence of some change in the Soviet attitude towards the League of Nations was give by Stalin himself, in an interview with Walter Duranty on December 25th 1933:

¹ J.V.Stalin, "Works", Vol.13, p.309. Stalin continued, "Those who want peace and seek business relations with us will always have our support. But those who try to attack our country will receive a crushing repulse to teach them in future not to poke their pig snouts into our Soviet garden. (Thunderous applause)", p.312.

² Izvestia, January 1st 1934.

³ DVP, Vol.XVI, Appendix 2, p.786. Speech of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, M.M. Litvinov to the IVth Session TsIK USSR, December 29th 1933. Lord Chilston, the British Ambassador in Moscow saw this as a hint that the USSR did not wish to be left out of any future discussions regarding the League or an extension of the Four Power Pact. Chilston to Simon, December 31st 1933. PRO, FO371/18727, N14/2/38.

In spite of the German and Japanese withdrawal from the League - or possibly because of it - the League could become a factor in retarding the outbreak of hostilities, or in preventing them altogether. If that is so, if the League can prove to be something of an obstacle that would make war at least somewhat more difficult and peace to some extent easier, then we shall not be against the League. Yes, if such is the course of historical events, the possibility is not excluded that we shall support the League of Nations, despite its colossal shortcomings.⁴

This, plus Molotov's comment on December 28th 1933 that "even the League of Nations stands to some extent in the way of 'freedom' of action for the interventionists",⁵ gave wide currency to rumours that the Soviet Union was prepared to join the League. The implications of such a reversal of Moscow's previous views, were considerable both for Soviet foreign policy as a whole and for the Russian attitude towards international organisations and conferences. Prior to 1933, even an invitation for Russia to take part in an international conference was seen in Moscow as a gain. The aims of the Soviet Government at those gatherings in which it did participate, tended to be the negative ones of attempting to split any united capitalist front and to make as much propaganda capital as was possible. Now Moscow was faced by threats in the Far East and Europe more tangible than the vague fear of foreign intervention, and was thus seeking to make use of the League or any future international body, in the interests of Russian security. Soviet Conference Diplomacy would henceforth serve the same end, both inside the League and out.

⁴ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.438, p.768. Conversation of J.V.Stalin with New York Times correspondent Duranty, December 25th 1933.

⁵ Izvestia, December 29th 1933. On January 23rd 1933, Molotov had strongly criticized the League's attitude to the Far Eastern crisis. DVP, Vol.XVI, No.22, p.54.

The negotiations which led to Soviet membership of the League were a part of the wider contacts between France and the USSR in the period of rapprochement⁶ which followed the Franco-Soviet estrangement of the Four Power Pact period. Eden⁷ states that he first heard of possible Soviet membership of the League in a conversation with French Premier Barthou in May 1934.⁸ The Japanese were concerned as to the Russian attitude to the League, as early as February 1933, having heard of the USSR's invitation to join the League Advisory Committee on the Sino-Japanese crisis.⁹ In fact the first French sounding of Soviet feelings with regard to the League was made during a conversation between Ambassador Dovgalevsky and Paul-Boncour, the French Foreign Minister, on November 19th 1933. Paul-Boncour stated that the German withdrawal from the League and the Disarmament Conference had created a difficult situation, the only solution of which would be "in his opinion, the USSR's joining of the League of Nations."¹⁰

⁶ For French diplomatic correspondence concerning this improvement in Franco-Soviet relations, see, DDF, Ire Série, Vol.IV, Nos. 163, 195, 204, 228, 249, 251, 308, 339, and 395.

⁷ Robert Anthony Eden, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. (Later, Earl of Avon).

⁸ The Earl of Avon, "The Eden Memoirs - Facing the Dictators", (London, 1962), (Hereinafter: Eden), p.97. See also, Eden to Simon, May 19th 1934. PRO, FO371/18298, N2973/2/38.

⁹ See, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.52, p.123. Record of a Conversation between Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, with the Japanese Ambassador to the USSR, Ota, February 27th 1933. Moscow chose to reject the invitation, see, *ibid.*, No.63, p.147, and Degras, Vol.III, pp.7-8.

¹⁰ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.390, p.682. Letter from the Counsellor to the Polpred USSR in France to Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, N.N.Krestinsky, November 25th 1933.

René Massigli¹¹ endorsed this view, despite Dovgalevsky's negative response. Three days later Paul-Boncour asked the USSR to play an active part in the work of the League's General Commission.¹²

The Narkomindel responded cautiously to these French proposals. Dovgalevsky received the following instructions:

The question concerning the League of Nations we regard as being open to discussion, and we agree to consider it. But there will be considerable reservations on our part which we will set out during concrete talks, if such take place. The question concerning mutual assistance we also see as being open to discussion and we have no objection to hearing concrete proposals.¹³

This reference to mutual assistance arose from a conversation with Dovgalevsky on October 20th 1933, when Paul-Boncour had suggested that "the question of additions to the Franco-Soviet pact" might arise. He also mentioned the possibility of a pact of mutual assistance between the two countries.¹⁴

Dovgalevsky's response was evasive, and the French again raised this question when Litvinov met Paul-Boncour in Paris on October 31st 1933. On this occasion Litvinov countered the French suggestion of some form of mutual-assistance pact

¹¹ Massigli was the French representative at the League and at the Disarmament Conference.

¹² DVP, Vol.XVI, No.390, p.684.

¹³ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.396, p.695. Telegram from the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, to the Polpred USSR in France Dovgalevsky, November 29th 1933.

¹⁴ Ibid., No.322, p.577. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in France to the NKID USSR, October 20th 1933. Soviet sources often give the impression that France took the initiative in the rapprochement with the USSR which led to the Mutual Assistance Pact and Soviet membership of the League. In fact it is still difficult to ascertain who began the detente. For instance, Litvinov had suggested a secret verbal agreement between the two countries in July 1933. The French felt this might damage their relationship with Britain. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.IV, No.20. Note of the "Direction Politique", July 19th 1933.

by mentioning that some thought should also be given to the East, and not just to a possible threat from Germany,¹⁵ but once again nothing concrete was decided. Paul-Boncour later spoke of the matter with some urgency, "He emphasised that time was pressing and that the working out of some form of mutual-assistance agreement or other type of co-operation should be measured in weeks."¹⁶

The Narkomindel, however, was cautious in its approach to the French proposals. Alphand had been instructed to see Radek while in Warsaw and to reassure him of the harmless nature of the current Franco-German talks, which Alphand duly did, adding that the Soviet Ambassador in Paris had been given similar assurances and that it was intended to begin the "immediate study of all formulae proper to the strengthening of solidarity between France and Russia."¹⁷ Three days earlier, Dovgalevsky had asked Paul-Boncour for further clarification of the French proposals, to which the latter had agreed, "although he was apparently perplexed by exactly what 'concretisation' we wanted with regard to the question of the League of Nations."¹⁸

The French Government had decided that Soviet membership of the League of Nations would be essential before the

¹⁵ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.332, p.595. Telegram from the Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the NKID USSR, from Paris, October 31st 1933. No account of this meeting has been found in the French archives, though the meeting between Litvinov and Paul-Boncour had been arranged on October 30th. Litvinov was on his way to the USA. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.IV, No.375. Note from the 'Direction Politique', October 30th 1933. See, also, Borisov, "Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya", p.202.

¹⁶ DVP., Vol.XVI, No.337, p.602. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in France Dovgalevsky to the NKID USSR, November 1st 1933.

¹⁷ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.77. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, December 4th 1933. See also, *ibid.*, No.86, Alphand to Paul-Boncour, December 5th 1933.

¹⁸ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.397, p.696. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in France Dovgalevsky to Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR Krestinsky, December 1st 1933.

conclusion of any Franco-Soviet agreement,¹⁹ but Russian replies were at first not very encouraging. On December 5th, Litvinov saw the French Ambassador, de Chambrun, in Rome, and seemed to rule out the possibility of Soviet League membership. De Chambrun reported:

In talking to me about the League of Nations, the Soviet Minister told me that in his opinion Italy would withdraw sooner or later. Four of the seven greatest Powers, he added, are not part of the Geneva organisation which has failed in its task by showing weakness towards Japan. When I indicated to him that, perhaps one day the presence of Russia might give the League of Nations new strength, M. Litvinov answered that the USSR could not risk seeing its policy judged by a tribunal on which sat representatives of states which did not even have diplomatic relations with it.

Litvinov also expressed some surprise at the French reluctance to conclude the 'gentlemen's agreement' on the exchange of information.²⁰ Paul-Boncour told the Soviet Ambassador that he hoped the Soviet decision on the League was not final and that at least some co-ordination of approach to international problems might be achieved. He stressed that Russian membership of the League would "greatly facilitate negotiations concerning mutual-assistance."²¹

Alphand reported on December 11th, that in a conversation with Litvinov, the Soviet Minister informed him that he was

¹⁹ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.84. Note from the 'Direction Politique', December 5th 1933. This document also contains the thoughts of the French Government on the concept of the Eastern Locarno Pact, which Borisov claims was of Soviet origin. He cites as proof the Soviet note to the French Government of December 28th 1933. Borisov, "Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya", p.204.

²⁰ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.80. De Chambrun to Paul-Boncour, December 5th 1933

²¹ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.413, p.725. Telegram from Polpred USSR in France Dvlgalevsky to NKID USSR, December 6th 1933. See also, DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.88. Paul-Boncour to Alphand, December 6th 1933.

aware of the French desire for Soviet membership of the League and would study the proposition very carefully,²² though in earlier conversations²³ he had repeated the objections which he had made to de Chambrun in Rome on December 5th. Litvinov hoped that the League issue would not be connected with the question of the proposed agreement on the exchange of information.²⁴ On the next day Alphand informed Paul-Boncour that some modification of the League Covenant may be necessary before the USSR could consider membership.²⁵ In a conversation with Dovgalevsky just before the latter's departure for Moscow, Paul-Boncour had the impression that Litvinov was examining the French proposals very closely. He realised that the clauses of the League Covenant concerning arbitration and sanctions might require alteration, and urged Alphand to use tact in persuading the Russians to join the League, for without Soviet membership of the League the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet mutual-assistance pact would be more difficult.²⁶ Alphand commented on the favourable atmosphere in Moscow for Franco-Soviet cooperation in the fields of commerce and industry, in his despatch to Paul-Boncour on December 20th, and asked him to assure the Soviet Government of the routine nature of visits by French industrialists to Germany.²⁷

²² DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.105. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, December 11th 1933.

²³ Ibid., for a resumé of Alphand's telegrams to Paul-Boncour of December 7th 1933.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., No.111. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, December 12th 1933.

²⁶ Ibid., No.139. Paul-Boncour to Alphand, December 15th 1933.

²⁷ Ibid., Nos.158 and 160. Alphand to Paul-Boncour, December 20th 1933. Chastenot, the head of the 'Comité des Forges' was at this time visiting Germany. For details of the Franco-Soviet customs agreement and commercial relations, see, *ibid.*, Nos.183 and 213.

Thus, before the end of 1933 the Soviet Government knew that France was anxious to see the establishment of closer relations with the USSR, which was an encouraging factor for Moscow in view of events in Germany and the Far East, and a card which could be played should the situation require it.

On December 28th 1933 Dvlgalevsky handed Paul-Boncour the Soviet proposals based on the original French suggestions. These proposals extended the idea of Franco-Soviet mutual assistance to include Germany, Belgium, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland, and were thus the first stage in the negotiations to create an Eastern Locarno which lasted until the middle of 1935. An integral part of the Soviet reply was that under certain conditions, "the USSR would join the League of Nations."²⁸

In his report to the Seventeenth Party Congress, Stalin was clearly showing his characteristic caution with regard to this new orientation in Soviet foreign policy, which was to have as its basis Russian membership of the League and mutual assistance pacts with France and several other European Powers. This alignment was to be directed at the containment of any possible German or Japanese aggression.

An important reason for the Soviet desire to make the rapprochement with France more substantial, were the prolonged German-Polish negotiations²⁹ which had been proceeding in some secrecy since Polish Ambassador Lipski's visit to Hitler on

²⁸ DVP, Vol.XVI, Note No.321, pp.876-877. See also, "Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn", (Moscow, 1963), No.6, pp.149-159.

²⁹ Moscow was aware of these negotiations. Stomonyakov noted Lukasiewicz's embarrassment when asked directly about the proposed Polish-German non-aggression pact. SPO, Vol.VI, Nos. 70, 75 and 78.

November 15th 1933.³⁰ On December 14th the USSR proposed that Poland should sign a joint declaration that both countries were determined to safeguard peace in Eastern Europe and the independence of the Baltic States.³¹ The Soviet aim was perhaps either to disrupt the German-Polish talks or to divine Poland's real intentions.

However, after accepting the Soviet proposal on December 19th 1933,³² Poland signed an agreement with Germany on January 26th 1934, mutually renouncing the use of force.³³ A week later Poland retracted her acceptance of the Soviet proposal, a move which convinced the Soviet Government of "the far-reaching character of the Polish-German rapprochement."³⁴ Neither Beck's subsequent visit to Moscow,³⁵ nor the prolongation

³⁰ For details of this visit see, "The Polish White Book" (London, 1940), No.6. pp.16-19. DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.69, p.128. W.Jedrzejewicz, ed., "Diplomat in Berlin 1933-1939. Papers and Memoirs of Jozef Lipski", (New York, 1968), p.99.

³¹ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.426, p.747. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the Polish envoy in the USSR, Lukasiewicz, December 14th 1933. See also, SP0, Vol.VI, Nos.86 and 87. Nadolny described this Soviet suggestion as an attempt to create "at least the moral impression of an eastern block against Germany. DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.187.

³² DVP, Vol.XVI, No.431, p.755. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the Polish envoy in the USSR Lukasiewicz, December 19th 1933. See also, SP0, Vol.VI, No.91.

³³ For the text of the "Declaration of Non-Aggression and Understanding between Germany and Poland", see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.219, p.421. See also, K.Liapter, "O pol'sko - germanskoy soglasenii 1934 goda", Voprosy Istorii, (Moscow, 1962), No.10, pp.99-109. Beck states that the Pact was an attempt to maintain Poland's independent position between her two powerful neighbours. Beck, "Final Report", pp. 32-35.

³⁴ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.42, p.107. Letter from (Stomonyakov) to Polpred USSR in Poland Antonov-Ovseenko, February 4th 1934.

³⁵ For details of Beck's conversations with Litvinov, see, SP0, Vol.VI, Nos. 107 and 108. Dovgalevsky complained that these talks had been disappointing. DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.446.

of the Soviet-Polish non-aggression pact³⁶ compensated for what in Russian eyes was the German success in weaning Poland towards her after sixteen years during which hostility to Poland had been a common factor between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The negotiations to conclude the Eastern Locarno Pact formed the background to the Soviet decision to join the League of Nations. The Eastern Pact never materialized, but for the Soviet Union it was a useful method of assessing German intentions.³⁷ With this in mind Litvinov had, on March 28th 1934, proposed that the Soviet and German Governments should guarantee the independence and inviolability of the Baltic States.³⁸ This the German Government refused to do, and though Nadolny tried to make the rejection less blunt,³⁹ both he and Litvinov realised that there was little hope of a significant improvement in Soviet-German relations. This made the relationship with France all the more important and membership of the League more urgent than had been the case in 1933.

³⁶ For the text of this protocol, see, SP0, Vol.VI, Nos.126 and 127.

³⁷ See, Chilston to Simon, June 15th 1934, PRO, FO371/17747, C4090/247/18. Chilston pointed out that, "M.Litvinov is probably not averse from seeing Germany in rather an awkward situation... (he) would doubtless point the finger at Germany as the "enemy" who will not accept the principle of non-aggression."

³⁸ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.94, pp.214-215. Record of a conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the German Ambassador in the USSR, Nadolny, March 28th 1934. See also, *ibid.* Note 99, p.787.

³⁹ DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.401, p.746. Nadolny to the Foreign Ministry, April 15th 1934. See also, *ibid.*, Nos.362 and 414. Nadolny was personally in favour of better German-Soviet relations. His advice was, however, ignored by his superiors.

Paris noted the Soviet stipulations that Russia was prepared to join the League if changes could be made to the League Covenant with regard to those clauses concerning the resort to war as a solution of international problems, arbitration and colonial mandates. Moscow also wanted the inclusion of a clause on racial and national equality and the establishment of normal diplomatic relations with all other member states.⁴⁰ To these conditions the French Government did not object. However, France would not agree to any mutual-assistance agreement which might involve her in commitments outside Europe, which was the implication of the Soviet proposal that the pact should include mutual aid in the event of unexpected aggression.⁴¹

There followed a brief period of uncertainty in French policy as to the relative advantages of a pro-Soviet or pro-German line, which was caused by changes in the French Government.⁴² However, on February 3rd 1934 Alphand reassured Litvinov that the new Government would follow the line of Franco-Soviet rapprochement.⁴³ Six days later the Doumergue Government came into office, and the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louis Barthou, informed Dvlgalevsky on February 24th, that he welcomed the improvement in Franco-Soviet relations and promised to continue to "act in the spirit of his predecessors."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.193. Departmental Note on conversation between Léger and Dvlgalevsky, January 4th 1934.

⁴¹ Ibid., No.277. Note of the 'Direction Politique', January 26th, 1934.

⁴² DVP, Vol.XVII, No.26, p.70. Letter from Polpred USSR in France to Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, January 25th 1934. Daladier replaced Paul-Boncour as Minister of Foreign Affairs on January 30th, and was in turn replaced by Barthou on February 9th 1934.

⁴³ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.318. Alphand to Daladier, February 3rd 1934.

⁴⁴ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.68, p.166. Telegram from Polpred USSR in France to NKID USSR, February 24th 1934.

A French Foreign Ministry Departmental Note of February 12th, reviewed the current state of Franco-Soviet relations in the economic, technical and political fields, and noted that negotiations for Soviet membership of the League of Nations were in progress. This was still seen as being an essential preliminary step before the conclusion of a mutual-assistance pact. The latter was envisaged as involving Poland and the Little Entente:

A system of assistance between the USSR, Poland and the Little Entente would be usefully completed by a consultative pact, in which France could participate and by which the signatories would act together with the aim of preventing European conflicts.⁴⁵

In Moscow on February 26th, Litvinov told Alphand that he was pleased with the atmosphere of the first conversation between Dovgalevsky and Barthou, though he expressed doubts concerning Poland's response to any proposal that the USSR should join the League. Litvinov also learned from Alphand that Herriot in particular, desired Soviet membership of the League, which he believed, would create "a permanent base for joint action" between the two countries. He also felt that negotiations were proceeding too slowly,⁴⁶ a view shared by Moscow and which the Soviet Chargé in Paris, Rozenberg, had communicated to Barthou, on March 28th.⁴⁷ On April 20th, Barthou informed Rozenberg that the French Cabinet had "decided to continue

⁴⁵ DDF, Ire Série, Vol.V, No.366. Departmental Note, February 12th 1934. For details of commercial and military (air) negotiations, see, *ibid.*, Nos.311, 420 and 421.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, No.436. Alphand to Barthou, February 26th 1934. Litvinov's comment on Poland was a reply to Daladier's enquiry as to the possibilities of better Soviet relations. *Ibid.*, No.349, Daladier to Alphand, February 9th 1934. This was sent half an hour before Barthou replaced Daladier as Minister of Foreign Affairs. See, also, DVP, Vol.XVII, No.69, p.166. Record of a Conversation between Litvinov and the French Ambassador in the USSR, Alphand, February 26th 1934.

⁴⁷ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.97, p.221. Telegram from Temporary Chargé d'Affaires USSR in France to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR, Litvinov, March 28th 1934. Dovgalevsky was ill.

negotiations with the USSR on the basis of the Paul-Boncour proposals."⁴⁸

Léger, in a conversation with Rozenberg on April 24th, expressed the view that unless the Soviet Union agreed to join the League of Nations, "it would not be possible to consider mutual-assistance and the pact would have to be limited to mutual consultation over foreign affairs and economic co-operation." Rozenberg countered this by suggesting that "the moment might come when, irrespective of how our relations with France might turn out, we might join our interests with those of the League."⁴⁹ Clearly both nations felt that much was to be gained by a rapprochement, but neither wished to act too precipitately.

The Eastern Locarno proposal was discussed in talks between Litvinov and Barthou during May and June 1934, the Soviet-French draft of the treaty being completed towards the end of June. The decision to invite Germany to join the Pact was to seal its fate,⁵⁰ making a separate Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact the increasingly likely outcome of the negotiations. The Eastern Locarno Pact was to involve Poland, the Baltic States, Finland, Czechoslovakia, Germany and the USSR in the signing of a treaty mutually guaranteeing the inviolability of their frontiers and undertaking to assist any of the signatories should they be attacked and to give no

⁴⁸ Ibid., Note No.71, pp.781-782. See also, No.138, p.280. Telegram from Temporary Chargé d'Affaires in France to NKID USSR, April 20th 1934.

⁴⁹ Ibid., No.144, pp.296-298. Record of a Conversation of the Temporary Chargé d'Affaires USSR in France with General Secretary of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Léger, April 24th 1934.

⁵⁰ For the German attitude to the Pact, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.486, p.880. The Germans had the impression that the Pact was Litvinov's idea, rather than a joint Franco-Soviet creation.

assistance to the aggressor. Under a Franco-Soviet mutual assistance treaty France would guarantee the Eastern Pact while the Soviet Union would guarantee Locarno. The crucial factor in the implementation of the proposed scheme was Soviet membership of the League. Thus it was agreed that,

the conclusion of the pacts would not be postponed until our joining of the League of Nations, it being sufficient to include in the pacts an article which would come into force only after our joining of the League.⁵¹

In a letter to Potemkin, the Soviet Ambassador in Rome, Litvinov stated that in spite of numerous rumours and press articles the USSR had made no decision with regard to the League of Nations, and indeed that "for us the question of joining the League independently, for the present, does not exist", for the Eastern Pact was to be based on the League Covenant.⁵²

However, the opposition of Poland⁵³ and Germany⁵⁴ to the Eastern Pact delayed negotiations to such an extent that it

⁵¹ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.186, p.371. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the NKID USSR, from Geneva, June 4th 1934.

⁵² Ibid., No.218, p.417. Letter from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in Italy, Potemkin, June 27th 1934. According to Fritz von Twardowski, the German Charge in Moscow, Litvinov had told the Italian Ambassador, Attolico, that "if the Eastern Pact did not materialize, he would be prepared, in order to end the intolerable tension in Europe, to conclude a bilateral assistance treaty with France." He added that the Pact was the result of a French initiative. DGFP, Series C, Vol.III, No.11, p.19. Twardowski to the Foreign Ministry, June 18th 1934.

⁵³ Beck had told Moltke, the German Ambassador in Warsaw that Poland was opposed both to the Eastern Pact and to Soviet membership of the League, unless Poland was given a seat on the League Council. DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.465, p.845. Moltke to the Foreign Ministry, May 25th 1934. See also, Beck, "Final Report", pp.68-71.

⁵⁴ Neurath informed Litvinov, on June 13th, that Germany was not prepared to join such a pact-system. Neurath tried to ascertain whether the proposal had been of French or Soviet origin. Litvinov avoided giving a direct answer. DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.504, p. 902. Memorandum of the Foreign Minister, June 13th 1934.

seemed probable that if the USSR did not join the League during the September session of the Assembly, it would have to postpone membership until 1935. This would mean that after two years of negotiation the Soviet Union might well be in a position of isolation, outside the League, and with no mutual assistance agreements to compensate for the loss of the German relationship. The French were also aware that such an eventuality would damage their own efforts to counterbalance the German threat. Payart put this to Litvinov on July 23rd 1934. He asked whether Russia would "ask for admission to the League before the Assembly", and referred to the Soviet position concerning the "inseparable links between joining the League and the pacts". Payart explained that his Government did not wish to put pressure on Moscow. He hoped, however, that the USSR would not postpone its joining of the League, especially in view of the favourable attitude of Great Britain and that the next League Assembly was not due until September 1935.⁵⁵

Three days later Litvinov instructed Rozenberg to inform Barthou, or Léger, that,

we still link our joining of the League of Nations with the conclusion of the pacts, but taking into account the advice of the French Government, and in accordance with its wishes, we are now prepared to proceed with the joining of the League upon the receipt from it of the corresponding invitation and guarantee of a permanent place on the League Council.⁵⁶

Litvinov stated that he counted on the French Government to initiate proceedings at Geneva, and suggested that the occasion for inviting the Soviet Union to join the League "could be

⁵⁵ DVP, Vol. XVII, No.266, p.495. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the French Temporary Chargé d'Affaires in the USSR, Payart, July 23rd 1934.

⁵⁶ Ibid., No.270, p.501. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to Temporary Chargé d'Affaires USSR in France, Rozenberg, July 26th 1934.

considered as being our announcement to the French Government on our readiness to become a member of the League."⁵⁷ Rozenberg transmitted Barthou's positive reply to the Narkomindel on July 28th. Barthou was confident that there would be few problems in gaining a seat for the USSR on the League Council, and that Polish opposition had relented somewhat.⁵⁸

The French undertook to sound out the views of the Powers most concerned by the possibility of Soviet membership of the League of Nations. On August 29th 1934, Alphand informed Krestinsky that, "The position of the principal Powers which France had sounded out, was positive."⁵⁹ The Narkomindel itself had also assessed the attitude of the same Powers. Poland remained something of an obstacle.⁶⁰ Great Britain officially welcomed the proposal, albeit with no excess of private enthusiasm, as is shown by a series of conversations between Maisky and Vansittart aimed at the clarification of Britain's attitude to Soviet membership of the League and to the Eastern Pact.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Note No.217, pp.810-811.

⁵⁹ Ibid., No.321, p.578. Record of a Conversation between the Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR and the French Ambassador to the USSR, Alphand, August 29th 1934.

⁶⁰ By September 10th Poland and the USSR had exchanged notes to the effect that after the Soviet Union had joined the League, Soviet-Polish relations would remain on their previous basis. SPO, Vol.VI, Nos.148 and 149.

⁶¹ See DVP, Vol.XVII, Nos. 226, 232, 245, 257, 272 and 303. According to one Soviet source, Britain opposed the Eastern Pact, and Maisky is said to have informed Vansittart that Soviet public opinion saw this as a British attempt to involve the USSR in a war with Germany and Japan. "Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn", (Moscow, 1963), No.6, p.157. This document does not appear in the relevant volume of "DVP" and in a number of later meetings Vansittart made it clear that Britain was not in fact opposed to the Pact. See DVP, Vol.XVII, No.431.

The initial British attitude to possible Russian membership of the League was somewhat ambiguous. Vansittart felt it would be,

a positive misfortune for the League if Russia joined before she has settled her differences with Japan. Such a contingency would only lead the League into further difficulty and discredit.⁶²

Later, Vansittart modified his view to one of cautious acceptance, "I should not dream of blackballing the candidate, though I should be very cautious in the cardroom."⁶³ By August, Vansittart's opinion had changed slightly in that he now saw Soviet membership of the League as a useful means of preventing any future Soviet-German alliance:

For if as I have always thought, there is a real possibility of a Russo-German rapprochement, we should and must be in a position to play a leading part in the prevention of this.⁶⁴

The British Government, despite reservations such as those expressed by Vansittart, realised that the French Government saw Soviet League membership as being vital to French interests and thus did nothing to oppose the plan, although in general the British attitude seems to have been that such diplomatic re-adjustments were of solely continental significance. For example, Britain informed the Germans that their suggestion that British participation in the Eastern Pact would produce a favourable German response to the project, was to no avail, as Britain contemplated no further European commitments.⁶⁵

⁶² Minute by Vansittart, January 2nd 1934, PRO, FO371/18298, N140/2/38.

⁶³ Minute by Vansittart, March 20th 1934, PRO, FO371/18298, N1741/2/38.

⁶⁴ Minute by Vansittart, August 3rd 1934, PRO, FO371/17749, C5314/247/18.

⁶⁵ DBFP, Series 2, Vol.VI, No.450. Simon to Phipps, June 12th 1934. See also DGFP, Series C, Vol.II, No.502, p.901. Hoesch to the Foreign Ministry June 13th 1934.

Chilston reported from Moscow that for the Soviet Union to agree to become a member of the League of Nations seemed "to prove (the) extraordinary anxiety felt by (the) Soviets for their security east and west."⁶⁶ This attitude was as much an indication of the equanimity of the Foreign Office to Japanese and German militarism, as of a Soviet over-reaction to the same threats.

The favourable British response to the proposals for the Eastern Pact earned Britain some approval in the Soviet press⁶⁷ but the British remained aloof from the negotiations, which retained their essentially Franco-Soviet character. Eden states that he did what he could to help, as he was "convinced that the League of Nations must gain from wider membership, whatever our views about Soviet policy. The League could not survive as a club, it might as a forum".⁶⁸ Vansittart seems to have expressed the general Foreign Office view of Soviet membership of the League of Nations when he commented, that whatever the present intentions of the Soviet Union, "She is no more pacific at heart than either of the other two. (Japan and Germany)".⁶⁹

Despite France's major part in the Eastern Locarno negotiations and the preparations for the Soviet joining of the League, the French Government had, like its British counterpart, some reservations. Léger expressed his apprehension in a conversation with Campbell, the Minister at the British

⁶⁶ Chilston to Simon, June 22nd 1934. PRO, FO371/17747, C4011/247/18.

⁶⁷ See Izvestia, July 15th 1934.

⁶⁸ Eden, p.98.

⁶⁹ Minute by Vansittart, March 27th 1934. PRO, FO371/18298, N1754/2/38.

Embassy in Paris. He was aware of the economic negotiations between Russia and Germany and felt that Russia's main desire was a partnership with a first-class Power which could cover their western flank in the event of a war with Japan. Léger saw Germany as the "ideal" Soviet candidate for such a plan as it would further damage the League and would prevent German-Japanese alliance. France was thus all the more ready to conclude an alliance with Russia in order to forestall Germany, once the Eastern Pact seemed likely to come to nothing.⁷⁰ Léger also suggested that a similar urgency motivated Litvinov who was anxious for concrete achievements after four years of pursuing the policy of rapprochement with the West in face of the disapproval of some of his colleagues who saw Russia's future in terms of an alliance with Germany.⁷¹ By the end of August, both France and the Soviet Union were committed to Soviet membership of the League and to some form of mutual assistance, with or without the other nations originally included in the scheme.

The position of Japan with regard to the new trend in Soviet foreign policy was predictable, as Japan like Germany had withdrawn from the League of Nations. The tension in the Far East had been exacerbated by the tortuous negotiations over the sale of the Soviet owned Chinese Eastern Railway to the Japanese and their arrest of several of its Soviet employees in mid-August 1934. Unless Soviet membership of the League made the latter a more effective instrument against Japanese

⁷⁰ Campbell to Simon, July 26th 1934. PRO, F0371/17749, C5219/247/18.

⁷¹ Clerk to Simon, August 2nd 1934. PRO, F0371/17749, C5284/247/18. Chilston also commented on the existence of "a faction (military authorities) which wishes an improvement in present bad relations with Germany." Chilston to Simon, August 13th 1934. PRO, F0371/17749, C5532/247/18.

expansion in China, Japan could remain virtually indifferent to the Soviet presence at Geneva. The news of British and French support for Soviet candidature, however, caused the Japanese to temporarily reduce their harrassment of the Soviet interests in the Far East.⁷²

Similarly, the Italian view of Soviet intentions towards the League of Nations was not of crucial importance to the Soviet Government, but in the event Mussolini favoured Soviet membership of the League.⁷³ At this time Mussolini seems to have seen the parvenu Hitler as a threat to both his prestige and Italy's position, rather than a future ally and mentor, thus Soviet-Italian relations were still at a particularly cordial level, as had been demonstrated by the signing of a Soviet-Italian non-aggression pact on September 2nd 1933.⁷⁴

Germany had proved quite unresponsive to all requests to join the projected Eastern Locarno, and although commercial links between the Soviet Union and Germany had been re-affirmed by the trade agreement of March 20th 1934,⁷⁵ political rapprochement had remained elusive. The German Government was not in favour of Soviet membership of the League,⁷⁶ and saw the proposal to include Germany in the Eastern Pact as a facade behind which Litvinov and Barthou proposed to construct a Franco-Russian alliance against Germany.⁷⁷

⁷² See DVP, Vol.XVII, Nos. 266,322, 326.

⁷³ Ibid., No.292, p.528. Record of a Conversation of the Polpred USSR in Italy with the Italian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Suvich, August 2nd 1934.

⁷⁴ For the text of this pact, see, Ibid., Vol.XVI, No.277, pp.494-496.

⁷⁵ See, DVP, Vol.XVII, No.85, pp.195-198, and DGFP, Series C, Vol.II. No.342, p.647.

⁷⁶ For details of the German attitude, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.III. No.189, p.378. Circular of the State Secretary (Bülow), September 3rd 1934.

⁷⁷ Neurath gave this view to Phipps, see, Foreign Office Memorandum, July 5th 1934. PRO, FO371/17747, C4533/247/18. See also, DGFP, Series C, Vol.III, No.200, p.396. Memorandum from the German Government, September 8th 1934.

The Soviet press used the German refusal to join the pact as a means of denouncing German policy in general:

Germany's delay in replying regarding the Eastern Pact had already called forth apprehension on the part of all those desirous of peace, and doubt in the sincerity of the German Government's peaceful intentions. The German reply further strengthens these doubts.⁷⁸

There was no indication of any change in the German attitude significant enough to delay the final stages of Soviet preparations to join the League, with the result that, on September 15th 1934, the culmination of Litvinov's efforts came in the form of an invitation to the USSR to join the League of Nations. This Litvinov accepted on behalf of the Soviet Union:

The Soviet Government, which has seen the principal task of its foreign policy as the organisation and strengthening of peace, and has never been deaf to suggestions of international co-operation in the interests of peace, takes into consideration that in so far as the invitation comes from the overwhelming majority of League members, and that this invitation conveys a real desire for peace on the part of the League of Nations, and its recognition of the need for co-operation with the USSR, is ready to answer it and become a member of the League of Nations, occupying its rightful place and undertakes to observe all international obligations and decisions binding members in accordance with Statute 1.⁷⁹

Litvinov's opening speech of September 18th, after Soviet election to the League Council,⁸⁰ was similarly laced with references to his country's consistent efforts for peace over the previous seventeen years. The Soviet Union, Litvinov

⁷⁸ Pravda, September 13th 1934.

⁷⁹ DVP, Vol. XVII, No. 331, p. 589. Letter from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the President of the XV Assembly of the League of Nations, Sandler, September 15th 1934.

⁸⁰ Wheeler-Bennett describes the USSR as "a courted and feted prodigal, over whom there was more joy in Geneva than over many of the more zealous devotees of the Covenant." Wheeler-Bennett, "Munich. Prologue to Tragedy", p. 276-7. Beck describes his attempts to make the Soviet entry seem less of a triumph. Beck, "Final Report", pp. 64-68.

explained, had been opposed to the League for the first fifteen years of its existence because its membership had included states hostile to the USSR, thus causing "the peoples of the Soviet Union to fear that these states, having joined the League, would give their hostility to the Soviet Union a collective form by continuing their anti-Soviet activities." The increasingly serious international situation and the economic crisis had, however, produced a different atmosphere in the League, which despite its shortcomings had attempted to halt this deterioration of the international situation. Thus the interests of the League and the Soviet Union had at last coincided, although Litvinov stated that the USSR would bear no responsibility for actions and decisions taken by the League prior to Soviet membership, with particular reference to racial equality and the colonial mandate system. The preservation of peace and the good of mankind were now common aims:

Aims, for which the Soviet Government has not ceased to work throughout the duration of its existence. Henceforward it wishes to join its forces with those of other states represented at the League. In this forthcoming common task, before both you and us I am convinced that the desire for peace of a state of 160 million, peace for itself and for other states will be powerfully felt. And, observing the beneficial results of this influx of fresh strength to the common business of guaranteeing peace, I am convinced that we with you, will always remember with the greatest satisfaction the present date which will occupy an honoured place in the annals of the League."⁸¹

These fine words, though no doubt suitable for the occasion, do not disguise the fact that Soviet membership of the League of Nations was essentially a "tactical" move in the larger field of Soviet foreign policy, adopted by the Soviet Government

⁸¹ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.334, pp.594-600. Speech of the President of the Soviet delegation, Litvinov, to the XV Assembly of the League of Nations, September 18th 1934.

to counter an international situation in which the USSR was threatened by Japan and Germany. There was no ideological change in the Soviet attitude, capitalism was still the enemy:

But not all capitalist States are in the same situation. The states which came out of the World War most enriched from a material and territorial point of view are not at the present moment aiming at a re-division of the world. The others, the vanquished of the World War, or those who did not receive all they sought to win, and who are suffering more severely from the crisis of capitalism, having no reserves which would permit them to hope for an escape from the crisis, are now aiming at a re-division of the world, as a means of healing their own wounds at the cost of other states. They are thinking in the first instance of expansion at the expense of the USSR and are planning an anti-Soviet war, hoping for the aid of the whole imperialist world.⁸²

The Soviet Union, in its move to join the League, was thus associating itself with the non-expansionist Powers, such as France which,

earlier than other Powers, understood the role of the Soviet Union in the struggle for peace and took into her own hands the initiative of strengthening the Soviet Union into its work.⁸³

One Soviet post-war source suggests that the Soviet reasons for becoming a member of the League of Nations were not solely aimed at the creation of a system of collective security, but that both the Soviet joining of the League,

and the subsequent activities of Soviet diplomacy in this international organisation made it difficult for the Western powers to conceal their policy of encouraging aggression and solidarity of peace and progress.⁸⁴

Clearly the Soviet Government had not changed its conception of the basic nature of capitalist states, any more

⁸² Pravda, September 17th 1934.

⁸³ Izvestia, September 17th 1934. For a standard Stalinist view of the Soviet Union and the League, see, O Afanseyevna, "Kratkii ocherk Ligi Natsii", (Moscow, 1945).

⁸⁴ Trukhanovsky, "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR", p.307.

than those same capitalist states had abandoned their suspicion of the Soviet Union, a formula hardly likely to guarantee the success of any action the League might be called upon to take. The question of the sincerity of the Soviet approach to the League thus raised, is usually answered by reference to the Soviet ideological commitment to Marxism-Leninism, which is taken to preclude any genuine attempt at international co-operation, or loyalty to the League of Nations. Yet Stalin was no more a slave to ideology than Lenin had been, and it was undeniably true that the Soviet Union in 1934 was faced by threats both in the East and in the West. Therefore a Soviet attempt to combine with those Powers opposed, however hesitantly, to aggressive expansion, was not unpredictable and indeed was very much encouraged by France.

If, on the other hand, Stalin's joining of the League and his policy of collective security were both part of a gigantic bluff to put the USSR in a stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis Nazi Germany,⁸⁵ then it was a bluff which Britain and France chose never to call. The failure of the League after 1934 was less the result of Soviet ideological incompatibility with its fellow members, than the refusal of the Western Powers to act either alone or in concert with the USSR to counter common threats:

If the Council or Assembly were ever to take any collective action against aggression, it would not be because they had been persuaded by the force and logic of Litvinov's speeches. It would be because the French and particularly the British delegations would arrive at the same conclusions.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ This is the view of Walter Krivitsky, whose former position as Chief of Soviet Military Intelligence in Western Europe, gives some weight to this assertion. W.G.Krivitsky "I was Stalin's Agent" (London, 1940), pp.19-20.

⁸⁶ Buzinkai, "Soviet-League Relations, 1919-1939. A Survey and Analysis", p.187.

The mistrust which London and Paris displayed towards the Soviet Union meant that Soviet declarations and protestations were never put to the test. This allowed Moscow, in its international relations, to adopt a position of moral superiority, a position which accorded ill with Soviet internal policies.

Soviet membership of the League was, from a propaganda standpoint, an enormous success. It gave Litvinov an even wider audience for his hortatory speeches than had the Disarmament Conference. The Soviet Union could be shown as a vigorous upholder of the ideals of the League, in contrast to the behaviour of Britain and France, whose attitude seemed much more equivocal:

No future historian will lightly disagree with any views expressed by Litvinov on international questions. Whatever may be thought of the policy and purposes of his government, the long series of his statements and speeches in the Assembly, the Council, the Conferences, and Committees of which he was a member between 1927 and 1939 can hardly be read today without an astonished admiration. Nothing can compare with them in frankness, in debating power, in the acute diagnosis of each situation. No contemporary statesman could point to such a record of criticisms justified and prophecies fulfilled.⁸⁷

The Soviet Government had not only succeeded in the propaganda sphere, for as a result of joining the League, the USSR was now undisputably among the leading diplomatic Powers of the world. Moscow could now legitimately expect to be consulted on all important international matters, both within and outside the League. In accordance with this new found position, the Soviet attitude to international conferences could also be expected to embody the Russian desire for the creation of a system of collective security. The motivation

⁸⁷ F.P.Walters, "A History of the League of Nations", (London, 1952), Vol.II, p.712.

behind the Soviet change of approach to the League and the reservations which must be made with regard to Russian intentions, apply as much to Soviet Conference Diplomacy as to the wider field of Soviet foreign policy as a whole.

In Europe the situation became less, rather than more stable, after the USSR had become a member of the League. In September 1934 Germany and Poland had officially declined to join the Eastern Pact. In France the assassination of Barthou in October, meant that the "reins of power had passed into the soiled hands of Pierre Laval."⁸⁸ Moscow showed signs of some nervousness at this new French Government and seemed to be hoping for a concrete Franco-Soviet agreement before the Saar plebiscite, scheduled for January 1935, gave an opportunity for better Franco-German relations.⁸⁹

Laval, though making no secret of his desire for improved relations with Germany, attempted to reassure Litvinov at a meeting on November 21st, in Geneva. He claimed that he proposed to follow the lines laid down by Barthou and to this end a mutual undertaking was concluded by which neither the USSR nor France would enter into separate negotiations with Germany. Each Government was to keep the other informed of any conversations which might take place.⁹⁰ A protocol to this effect, also expressing joint determination to secure the conclusion of the Eastern Pact was signed on December 5th 1934, and

⁸⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, "Munich. Prologue to Tragedy", p.278.

⁸⁹ Chilston to Simon, November 28th 1934. PRO, FO371/17751, C8033/247/18.

⁹⁰ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.397, pp.683-686. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the NKID USSR, Geneva, November 21st 1934. See also, Eden to Simon, November 21st, 1934. PRO, FO371/18297, N6525/1/38.

was joined by Czechoslovakia on December 9th.⁹¹

On April 9th 1935, Laval reversed his delaying tactics and agreed, no doubt with reservations, to conclude a bilateral pact with the Soviet Union by May 1st at the latest. This, like the Stresa Conference, was a response to the German renunciation of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.⁹² On May 2nd 1935, the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact was signed. Two weeks later, on May 16th, the closely linked Soviet-Czechoslovakian mutual assistance pact was signed.⁹³

However wholeheartedly the Soviet Union seemed to have adopted the policy of collective security, there were continual Soviet attempts to improve relations with Germany. Litvinov and Schulenburg, the German Ambassador in Moscow, on several occasions expressed mutual regret at the deterioration of the Soviet-German relationship.⁹⁴ Nothing came of these formal diplomatic contacts, whereas the frequent economic talks with

⁹¹ DVP, Vol.XVII, No.417, pp.725-726. Protocol between the USSR and the French Republic on questions concerning negotiations on the Eastern Pact, December 5th 1934. See, *ibid.*, No.424, for the Soviet Czech Agreement. Laval seemed to regard the protocol as less than a firm commitment to sign an agreement with Russia than as a "temporary instrument of conciliation" which he hoped would not embarrass the Franco-German rapprochement. Mourin, "Les relations franco-soviétiques, 1917-67", p.199.

⁹² See, "The Struggle of the USSR for Collective Security in Europe during 1933-1935", International Affairs. (Moscow), October 1963, pp.112-113. See also, Borisov, "Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya", p.248.

⁹³ Laval "had a somewhat peculiar conception of the role of pacts in general. For him, they were not alliances designed to preserve the balance of power, but rather public pledges of international good behaviour." G.Warner, "Pierre Laval", (London, 1968) p.80. See also, Scott, "Alliance against Hitler", p.245. Flandin stated that he saw the Franco-Soviet Pact as "a guarantee of Russian non-intervention against the neighbours of Germany", and added, "we never wanted to give Russia a guiding hand in our destinies (or)... bring the Russian army into the centre of Europe."

⁹⁴ See, DVP, Vol.XVII, Nos. 354, 364 and 407.

the Germans provided ideal opportunities to avoid normal diplomatic channels and sound out German opinion on a possible improvement in the political sphere. Hilger describes one such attempt made in July 1935, by David Kandelaki, the Soviet Trade representative in Berlin and Stalin's personal emissary.⁹⁵ Though no political agreement was achieved, economic relations between the two countries "continued without serious interruptions and, in some respects with unprecedented smoothness."⁹⁶

In fact 1935 marked the beginning of renewed economic collaboration between the USSR and Germany who required raw materials for her arms industries and had only limited reserves of foreign currency. Russia benefited from this situation by obtaining a new credit of RM.200,000,000 from Germany on April 9th 1935.⁹⁷ The negotiations leading up to this agreement had begun in late 1934.⁹⁸ Krivitsky states that although no political understanding had been achieved, Stalin was "tremendously encouraged" by the granting of this long term loan.⁹⁹ Characteristically, Stalin was operating at more than one level; that of collective security within the

⁹⁵ Hilger and Meyer, "The Incompatible Allies", p.270. For details of these, and later, Soviet overtures, see DGFP, Series C, Vol.IV, Nos. 211, 383, 387, 407, 439 and 453.

⁹⁶ Hilger and Meyer, "The Incompatible Allies", pp.283-287.

⁹⁷ See, DGFP, Series C, Vol.IV, No.21.

⁹⁸ See, DVP, Vol.XVII, No.361, pp.639-640. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar of Internal Trade USSR with the German Ambassador to the USSR, Schulenburg, October 15th 1934. See also, *ibid.*, Note No.271, p.823. For British reports on the trade talks see, Phipps to Simon, November 27th 1934. PRO, FO371/17751, C8036/247/18, and, Chilston to Simon, December 18th 1934. PRO, FO371/17751, C8892/247/18.

⁹⁹ Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", p.30.

League; mutual assistance pacts outside the League but in association with it; and that of direct, if clandestine, approach to Nazi Germany.

The Soviet Government, however, continued to promote the idea of joint action to counter the German threat, while the French and British made further attempts to come to some agreement with Germany. This was shown by the Franco-British communiqué of February 3rd, 1935, which proposed discussions concerning armaments, the Eastern Pact and Germany's return to the League. More important still was the decision of France, Italy and Britain to meet at Stresa to discuss Germany's unilateral repudiation of the military clauses of Versailles on March 16th 1935.

The Soviet Union was not to be invited to this Conference, though Izvestia suggested that collective consultation was required:

The times demand a speedy consultation of the Powers interested in the maintenance of peace. The times demand speedy decisions. Now that Germany has exposed the full significance of her aims the other Powers should expose the full extent of their means of defence and their capacity to defend peace for Europe and humanity.¹⁰⁰

In fact Eden¹⁰¹ visited Moscow prior to the calling of the Stresa Conference, and this may have assuaged Soviet suspicions of what was likely to take place at Stresa.

Like the Four Power Pact, the Stresa Conference was principally Mussolini's idea. It was made possible by the improvement in Franco-Italian relations which had marked Laval's

¹⁰⁰ Izvestia, March 18th 1935.

¹⁰¹ For details of Eden's visit to Moscow and his meeting with Stalin, see, DBFP, Series 2, Vol. XII, Nos. 669, 670, 673 and 695. See also, Eden, pp. 152-153. In general the Anglo-Soviet exchange of views was very cordial, see, Izvestia, April 1st 1935. Laval visited Moscow after Stresa. For the text of the I communiqué, issued on May 16th, see Degras, Vol. III, pp. 131-132.

meeting with Mussolini in January 1935. Mussolini's attitude to Germany at this time was extremely hostile, Hitler's designs on Austria being the principal cause of tension between the two countries. The most important reason for the meeting at Stresa seems, however, to have been Mussolini's desire for reassurances that Britain and France would not object to his proposed invasion of Ethiopia. Although Ethiopia was not on the agenda at Stresa "it was an auspicious time for Italian soundings."¹⁰²

Eden, Laval and Suvich¹⁰³ met on March 23rd, in Paris, where it was decided that the Foreign Ministers of the three Powers would meet at Stresa on April 11th. Later it was decided that Prime Ministers would also be present. Laval was more anxious than the British that such a conference should take place, although he had previously stressed that the final declaration could be of the simplest and most anodyne character.¹⁰⁴

Eden was prevented by illness from attending the conference. In his memoirs he is, however, critical of the behaviour of MacDonald and Sir John Simon, who failed to raise the crucial questions of Italian intentions towards Abyssinia,¹⁰⁵ and German intentions with regard to the Rhineland, and remained content with a general re-affirmation of the Locarno Agreements.

¹⁰² G.W.Baer, "The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War", (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). p.117.

¹⁰³ Fulvio Suvich, Under Secretary of State in the Italian Foreign Ministry.

¹⁰⁴ Clerk to Simon, March 20th 1935. PRO,FO371/18831, G2263/55/18. Vansittart, who took part in the Stresa meeting, agreed with the following views expressed by Foreign Office Counsellor, Orme Sargent, "I hope that, for France's sake as well as our own, we will at Stresa do all we can to prevent the conclusion of a direct Franco-Russian military alliance directed against Germany." DBFP, Series 2, Vol.XII, No.678. Minute by Sargent, April 11th 1935.

¹⁰⁵ Eden, p.179. MacDonald and Simon had agreed before their departure for Stresa that the subject had to be raised.

The confusion caused by this creation of Mussolini's "amateur diplomacy"¹⁰⁶ and the attitude of the British and French delegates at Stresa led Mussolini to draw the conclusion that Britain would not oppose any Italian action in Abyssinia, in return for his services against Germany. There had in fact, been no discussion of the Abyssinian problem during the Conference,¹⁰⁷ but as the final declaration was being drafted Mussolini asked, "was it not necessary to add the words 'of Europe' to the text?". The failure of either the British or the French to make any comment led Mussolini to conclude that, "the silence was a tacit consent given by the British government to Italian ambitions in Ethiopia."¹⁰⁸ Laval had already given a similar impression to the Italian leader at their meeting in Rome in January 1935.¹⁰⁹

The Stresa Conference had been called in order to present a common front to Germany. Eden states that it at least appeared to align the foreign policies of the three Governments.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Wiskemann, "The Rome-Berlin Axis", p.61.

¹⁰⁷ For a 'compte rendu' of the Stresa Conference, see, DBFP, Series 2, Vol.XII. No.722. pp.862-914.

¹⁰⁸ Baer, "The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War", p.122. See, Dell, "The Geneva Racket", p.111. Dell reports that as MacDonald left the Conference he was asked if Ethiopia had been discussed. "My friend," MacDonald replied, "your question is irrelevant." For Laval's part in the Conference at Stresa, see Warner, "Pierre Laval", pp.77-80. See also, I.Colvin, "Vansittart in Office", (London, 1965), pp.60-61. J.Harvey, ed., "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940" (London, 1970), p.137.

¹⁰⁹ Mussolini seems to have misunderstood Laval when the term "a free hand" was mentioned with regard to Africa. Warner "Pierre Laval", pp.66-70. Simone claims that Laval had given his tacit agreement to Mussolini's plans at the Rome meeting. Simone, "J'Accuse!" pp.101-102. See also, D.C.Watt, "The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia", Middle East Journal, Winter 1961, pp.69-77. See also, Viscount Templewood, "Nine Troubled Years" (London, 1954), pp.155-156.

¹¹⁰ Eden, p.180. Simon's memoirs contain only a brief, unhelpful mention of the Conference at Stresa. Viscount Simon, "Retrospect", (London, 1952), pp.203-204.

Yet Simon's contacts with the German Government before¹¹¹ and during the Conference,¹¹² which were to sound out German views on the proposed Eastern Pact, could not help but reveal the contradictions in Western policy. The decision to ignore the Soviet Union was taken despite the supposed Franco-Russian rapprochement, and despite the fact that any really credible attempt to curb German ambitions would almost certainly have to involve the USSR.¹¹³

Finally, and perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Conference for the Soviet Government, apart from its exclusion, was the equivocal attitude of France and Britain towards Italian ambitions in Abyssinia. The final declaration of the Conference was up to the standards Laval had desired, and was some indication of the bankruptcy of the whole episode:

The three powers, the object of whose policy is the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, find themselves in complete agreement in opposing by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger

¹¹¹ Simon promised German Ambassador Hoesch that "he would of course treat the German point of view with the respect it deserved and would also stress its positive aspects." DGFP, Series C, Vol.IV, No.17, p.22. Hoesch to the Foreign Ministry, April 8th 1935. Hoesch also noted Simon's disapproval of the rapprochement between France, Russia and Czechoslovakia.

¹¹² On April 11th, Simon sent a telegram to the British Embassy in Berlin asking for a clarification of the German attitude to the Eastern Pact. See *ibid.*, No.24. For the text of this telegram see, DBFP, Series 2, Vol.XII, No.717. Simon to Baldwin, April 13th 1935. (Baldwin was in charge of the Foreign Office during the absence of Simon and Vansittart). The telegram included the view that the "opportunity for keeping the door open for German cooperation so far as possible must on no account be missed." The German reply, according to Neurath's explanation to Ambassador Phipps, "was specially intended to be of assistance to the British delegation." See, *ibid.*, No.719. Phipps to Simon (Stresa), April 13th 1935.

¹¹³ See Pravda, March 31st 1935. Moscow was aware of France's feeble military situation as was shown by these comments by Marshal Tukhachevsky: "The French Army, with its 20 divisions, hastily reassembled units and its slowness in getting on to a war footing, by reason of its mobilisation system, is as yet incapable of any active opposition to Germany, and would lose a considerable amount of time in reaching a state of war-readiness before any such encounter."

the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose.¹¹⁴

The alignment resulting from the conference was rather grandly called the "Stresa Front", but a contemporary commentator described it more accurately as "a wall of paper incapable of withstanding the first gust of wind."¹¹⁵ And indeed the 'Front' could withstand neither the blow of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 18th 1935,¹¹⁶ nor Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia in October.

The resolution produced at Stresa was put before the League Council at Geneva,¹¹⁷ where it was overwhelmingly endorsed, it being agreed that action was to be taken against any state in future endangering peace by the unilateral repudiation of its international obligations. But as Eden recounts, "There was, however, an embarrassing moment."¹¹⁸

This came when Litvinov pointed out, to the irritation of Sir John Simon, that the terms of the resolution were apparently concerned with the security of peoples and the maintenance of peace in Europe. Litvinov declared his intention to make a reservation on this point. Sir John Simon insisted on retaining the geographical limitation of the Draft, and with some heat, asked that the Council should address themselves to

¹¹⁴ J.W.Wheeler-Bennett, ed., "Documents on International Affairs, 1935. Volume I", (London 1936), p.82. See Appendix No.3.

¹¹⁵ Simone, "J'Accuse!", p.93.

¹¹⁶ Negotiations for the Anglo-German Naval Agreement began almost immediately after the Stresa Conference. The Agreement caused an uproar in France and was evidence of a certain confusion in British diplomacy, as it was an infringement of Versailles, contradicted the Franco-British communiqué of February 3rd, and ignored the Stresa resolution. See, D.C.Watt, "The Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935; An interim Judgement", Journal of Modern History, June 1956, pp.155-175. Middlemas, "Diplomacy of Illusion", pp.39-40. Eden, p.230. Templewood, "Nine Troubled Years", pp.135-148.

¹¹⁷ See, Survey, 1935. p.165.

¹¹⁸ Eden, p.181.

a practical problem in a like spirit, and not at that particular moment spread the aspirations and endeavour, "... which we all desire to put into a practical shape, so wide that the whole of our efforts may be lost in shallows and miseries."¹¹⁹ The eloquence of this remark can hardly have compensated for the anxiety of the Ethiopian delegation. Although Litvinov's concern no doubt lay in the Far East, his attitude seems to indicate that he was more than sceptical about the value of the results of the negotiations at Stresa.

In the absence of primary sources it is difficult to assess accurately the contemporary Soviet reaction to the Stresa Conference. Radek produced a series of articles in Izvestia which offered the cooperation of the USSR in the cause of collective security,¹²⁰ stressed that the Soviet Union would not recognize any decisions arrived at without its participation,¹²¹ and finally which commented caustically on the whole affair.¹²² The lesson of Stresa, Radek stated, was that only collective resistance against German aggression had any chance of success.¹²³ However, the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Conference, and the Franco-British consultations with the German Government, can have created only apprehension in the Kremlin, where western diplomatic activity invariably took on a sinister aspect.

Subsequent Soviet accounts of the Stresa meeting tend to be both critical and, in retrospect, ironic. For example, the

¹¹⁹ See, Survey, 1935, p.166, and Baer, "The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War", p.135.

¹²⁰ Izvestia, April 6th 1935.

¹²¹ Izvestia, April 8th 1935.

¹²² Izvestia, April 16th 1935.

¹²³ Ibid.

statement that the participants limited themselves to expressions of regret at Germany's most recent infringement of Versailles, while "the question of sanctions in relation to a breach of the Versailles treaty was not seriously raised."¹²⁴ Laval's enquiry of the German Government as to whether the signing of the Franco-Soviet mutual assistance pact would hinder further negotiations between the three Powers and Germany, is also criticised, and was no doubt responsible for some consternation in the NKID. Similarly Simon's telegram to Berlin revealed the participants "more extreme readiness to listen to the enquiries of Fascist Germany, than concern for the creation of the Eastern Pact."¹²⁵ In "Istoriya diplomatii" the Conference is summed up as follows:

The result of Stresa was only a communiqué of the most general character. And yet all the diplomats of France and England acted as if they had achieved a great success in the strengthening of peace. The Anglo-French press announced with fanfares that the aggressors would henceforth be opposed by the 'Stresa Front'.¹²⁶

The only encouraging aspect of the Stresa Front for the Soviet Union, other than its speedy demise, was the indication that Britain and France were trying, however ineptly, to keep Italy and Germany apart, a tactic which despite its repeated lack of success, was to be an important feature of the policy of the western democracies for the next four years. Although the Stresa Front was not as direct a threat to the Soviet Union as Soviet sources claimed the Four Power Pact to be, the reluctance of Britain and France to see the USSR as a potential

¹²⁴ Trukhanovsky, "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnosheniya i vneshnei politiki SSR, 1919-1939", p.312.

¹²⁵ Ibid., (Moscow, 1961), p.436.

¹²⁶ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.614.

ally against any aggression, shown by its exclusion from the Stresa Conference, cannot have been reassuring to the Soviet Government during what purported to be a period of détente with France and after its having joined the League of Nations a mere seven months previously.

If, as Soviet sources claim, the Four Power Pact¹²⁷ was a rehearsal for Munich, then the Stresa Conference was a rehearsal for the diplomatic activity of the next four years. While Britain and France were trying to solve the German problem with an unlikely combination of confrontation and appeasement, Stalin, despite the change of emphasis in Soviet policy, was making secret attempts to reach a political understanding with Hitler.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Moscow showed some alarm at rumours of a new Four Power Pact, in late December 1934. See, DVP, Vol.XVII, No.437 and Note 322, p.833.

¹²⁸ Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", pp.29-31, 37-38.

Two events form the background to the Montreux Conference of 1936. The first, Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, had been met with the farce of economic and financial sanctions by the League of Nations. The second, the German re-occupation of the demilitarised Rhineland,¹ in contravention of the Locarno Agreements, had been met by confusion and inaction in London and Paris. Western reaction to these two aggressive acts no doubt confirmed Stalin in his contempt for the democracies.² However, in view of the failure to secure a firm political agreement with Hitler,³ France seemed to be Moscow's only hope of avoiding isolation. The second half of 1936, following the formation of the Blum Government on June 4th, marked the high water mark of the Popular Front movement, with France, governed by a Socialist - Radical Cabinet with Communist support, as the bastion of Moscow's system of collective security.

The Conference called at Montreux to deal with the regime of the Black Sea Straits, thus presented the first opportunity to see Soviet Conference Diplomacy in action since the USSR's joining of the League. Unlike the deliberations at Geneva, the outcome of the Montreux Conference was a matter of

¹ The French ratification of the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact was used by Hitler as the excuse for his action in the Rhineland. See DDF, 2e Série, Vol.I, Nos.528 and 532.

² See, Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent" p.19. For Soviet press reaction to Hitler's move, see, Pravda and Izvestia, March 8th, 1936. In Izvestia Radek stated that whether Germany took further similar steps would depend on the Western Powers' showing determination "to work out defensive counter-measures."

³ See, DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, Nos. 302, 312, 341 and 342. These documents give details of further Soviet approaches to the Germans made by Kandelaki and Bessonov, Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.

considerable strategic importance for the USSR. Despite the somewhat esoteric nature of the subject under review at Montreux, the course of the negotiations threw light not only upon the Soviet attitude to international conferences but upon the whole policy of collective security, Franco-Soviet relations and British policy towards Germany.

The Soviet Government had never ratified the Lausanne Straits Convention of 1923⁴ and had consistently supported Turkish attempts to have it revised, for neither Turkey nor the Soviet Union considered the Convention a sufficient guarantee of their security. Moscow feared possible western naval action in times of tension, and Turkey saw the International Control Commission as an intolerable limitation of her national sovereignty. But despite the close friendship and cooperation between the USSR and Turkey, neither could risk openly challenging the Lausanne agreement, although Turkey alone, if only by virtue of her geographical position, could hope to achieve the revision of the Lausanne Convention.

In many ways the diplomatic activity preceding the Montreux Conference was a Turkish diplomatic "tour de force", with the Great Powers trying to gain what advantage they could from the situation which Turkey had created. "Both the time and the method chosen by Turkey were....further evidence of the astuteness and perspicacity of Turkish statesmanship",⁵ for while Turkey maintained her close links with the Soviet Union, she refused to rely solely upon Soviet support and concluded treaties of friendship with Italy (May 30th 1928), France (February 3rd 1930) and with Greece her most bitter

⁴ See below, pp.20-25.

⁵ J.T.Shotwell and F.Dcak, "Turkey at the Straits, a Short History", (New York, 1940), p.121.

enemy for over a century (October 30th 1930). On July 18th 1932, Turkey was admitted to the League of Nations and by 1934 was a member of the League Council. She took a leading part in the Balkan Conferences and was a staunch member of the Balkan Entente. Thus Turkey's diplomatic credit stood very high, her economic and military strength were at a similar level, and she was on "good terms with almost every state represented at Geneva."⁶

The Turkish Government raised the question of the revision of the Lausanne Convention several times between May 1932, and April 11th 1936, when the Turkish proposals were finally accepted. These Turkish requests invariably found a favourable response in the Soviet press and were supported at Geneva by the Soviet delegate to the Disarmament Conference.⁷ On three occasions in 1935, in April during a meeting of the League Council, in May during the annual meeting of the Balkan Entente, and again at the plenary meeting of the League Assembly in September, the Turks declared that, "Turkey will not hesitate to take the necessary steps to ensure the security of the Straits in case of unforeseen circumstances."⁸

The moment chosen by Turkey to raise the question of revision once more, was well timed.⁹ Germany's violation of the treaty of Locarno by the re-militarisation of the Rhineland,

⁶ Survey for 1936, p.600.

⁷ See Izvestia, March 26th, May 26th, June 4th, 1933, and Pravda, April 4th and May 25th, 1933. See also DVP, Vol.XVI, No.93.

⁸ V.I. Popov, "Konferentsia v Montre 1936 goda", Voprosy Istorii 1963, No.11, p.48.

⁹ Titulescu, the Roumanian Foreign Minister, thought otherwise. He felt that the Turkish initiative would prompt the Hungarians to re-arm and would make his own position at home more precarious. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.58. Massigli to the Foreign Ministry, April 11th 1936. See also, FRUS, 1936, Vol.III, p.508. The Ambassador in Turkey (MacMurray) to the Secretary of State, April 14th, 1936. DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, No.300, p.483. Fabricius to the Foreign Ministry, April 29th 1936. Roumanian objections were removed after a visit from the Turkish Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Numan Menemencioglu.

and the inaction of Britain, France and the League, was a sufficient alteration in the status quo for Turkey to invoke Article XVIII of the Convention:

Should the freedom of the navigation of the Straits or the security of the de-militarised zones be imperilled by a violation of the provisions relating to freedom of passage, or by a surprise attack or some act of war or threat of war, the High Contracting Parties, and in any case France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan, acting in conjunction, will meet such violation attack, or other act of war or threat of war, by all means that the Council of the League of Nations may decide for this purpose.

The French Chargé in Istanbul, Lescuyer, noted on March 30th, that while the Turkish press had ceased to draw parallels between the German action in the Rhineland and Turkey's position vis-à-vis the Straits, the Turkish Government now felt confident that Britain, France and Russia would support any new initiative aimed at revision.¹⁰

The Turkish Government sent its note of April 11th 1936 to the eight signatory Powers of the Lausanne Convention, and in addition, to Moscow, Belgrade and the Secretary of the League of Nations. The main point of the note was the proposal that, in view of the failure of the Locarno Powers to fulfil their treaty obligations, Article XVIII of the Straits Convention, "...had become uncertain and inoperative and could no longer in practice shield Turkey from an external danger to her territory."

The Soviet attitude to the Turkish note was, predictably, favourable, just as it had been in 1935 when, "The position of Turkey concerning the revision of the Lausanne Convention was supported only by the Soviet Government."¹¹ The Soviet reply of April 16th 1936, emphasised the consistency of Russian

¹⁰ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.I, No.534. Lescuyer to Flandin, March 30th 1936. See DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.57. Kammerer to Flandin, April 11th, 1936.

¹¹ V.I. Popov, "Konferentsia v Montre 1936 goda", Voprosy Istorii 1963, No.11, p.48.

support for the Turkish position, and how this had been reaffirmed in the numerous treaties which had been concluded between the two nations.¹²

On this occasion, however, the USSR was not the only state to respond favourably to the Turkish request. Russia's erstwhile protagonist from the Lausanne Conference, Great Britain, also sent a positive reply to Ankara. The reasons for this changed British attitude were connected with the successful Italian aggression in Abyssinia and the German action in the Rhineland. This joint blow to international stability also had disturbing implications for Britain's Imperial trade routes through the Mediterranean. Eden explains his reasons for supporting Turkey's request as being to check both German and Soviet influence on Turkey, to thus strengthen Turkey in view of the declared Italian intention to dominate the Mediterranean, and to encourage the revision of treaties by discussion. In a memorandum to the British delegation at Montreux he wrote:

The fact that they (the Turks) have acted in so proper and correct a manner in trying to secure the revision of this treaty by negotiation and agreement, gives them a strong claim to favourable treatment. It is most important on general grounds that it should be made clear that treaty revision by agreement can pay as well as, or better than unilateral repudiation.¹³

Though as the British Ambassador in Turkey, Sir Percy Loraine, wrote, to once again reject a Turkish request for the revision of the Lausanne Convention would be to invite Turkey to take unilateral action in re-militarising the

¹² Degras, Vol.III, pp.188-189. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No. 89. Payart to Flandin, April 18th 1936, and *ibid.*, No.67. Alphand to Flandin, April 14th 1936. *Izvestia* April 18th 1936. For further expressions of Soviet approval of the Turkish request, see, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, April 14th 1936.

¹³ Eden, p.420.

Straits Zone,¹⁴ much as Germany had done in the Rhineland:

...the best method of keeping the Turkish Government on the narrow path of virtue as regards the Straits zones question would be to return a prompt and favourable response to their request for its discussion.¹⁵

The changed international situation now meant that Great Britain and France¹⁶ were now prepared to contemplate some revision of the Lausanne Convention, while Italy, still labouring under the albeit not overwhelming burden of League sanctions, was in no position to oppose such action. A peaceful revision of the Convention would thus not only earn Turkey,

all the moral prestige of being, in contrast with Germany, Austria and Italy, the 'good boys of Europe', but would avoid any further discrediting of the League which despite its failures was still held to be the protector of the smaller Powers.¹⁷

Turkey thus enjoyed the support of almost all the nations involved in any international attempt to revise the Straits regime, including the two traditional opponents over questions concerning the Straits, Great Britain and the USSR. Indeed one of the more striking features of the Conference, once called, was the way in which the Powers used their relations with Turkey for their own ends. Great Britain hoped to improve her relations with Turkey at the expense of the Soviet Union and as a useful potential ally in the Mediterranean. Eden believed that "it would be no bad thing if Anglo-Turkish friendship were seen by the Kremlin to be firm".¹⁸

¹⁴ Vansittart pointed out to Corbin, the French Ambassador in London, that the Turks could remilitarize the Straits in a matter of hours if they so desired. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.81. Corbin to Flandin, April 16th 1936. See also, FRUS, 1936, Vol.III, p.511. The Ambassador in the U.K. (Bingham) to the Secretary of State, April 20th 1936. Bingham reported that the Foreign Office felt the question of the re-fortification of the Straits to be "largely academic."

¹⁵ Loraine to Eden, April 4th 1936. PRO, FO371/20072, E1825/26/44.

¹⁶ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.107.

¹⁷ Survey 1936, p.585.

¹⁸ Eden, p.420.

The Soviet Government wanted security on its Black Sea flank and used the closeness of its relations with Turkey to exert pressure behind the scenes, while maintaining a public image as Turkey's friend and supporter. "Leaning on the friendly support of the Soviet Union the Turkish government again raised the question of the international-legal regime of the Black Sea Straits."¹⁹

The Soviet attitude to the Straits question was dominated, first and foremost by the desire to make long term strategic gains. But to state matters so explicitly would be untypical of all diplomatic activity, and especially that of the Soviet Union. The aims of Soviet strategy were thus camouflaged behind vociferous support for Turkish national sovereignty and Turkish defence requirements, in view of the threatening developments in the Mediterranean basin.²⁰ An article written in June 1936 drew attention to the tension between Great Britain and Italy during the Abyssinian crisis, and the threat to Turkey posed by Italy's island possessions in the Aegean, Rhodes and Leros, and concluded:

Under such conditions the demilitarised regime of the Straits is becoming more and more incompatible with the interests of Turkish national defence. It is clearly understandable that the Turkish government should now raise the question of a revision of the Straits regime in a decisive manner.²¹

Turkey was also praised, in words similar to those used by Eden, for having chosen the way of peaceful revision:

¹⁹ Dranov, "Chernomorskie prolivi", p.284.

²⁰ There was a certain identity of interests between the USSR and Turkey. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.326. Lescuyer to Flandin, June 20th 1936.

²¹ L.Ivanov, "Turtsiya i rezhim prolivov" Mirovoe khozyaistvo i mirovaya politika, (Moscow, 1936). No.6, p.85. In one work on the Straits, oblique reference was even made to the works of Marx and Engels as proof of the importance of the Straits. G.G.Guseinov, "Vopros o chernomorskikh prolivakh, 1917-1923", (Baku, 1958). p.3.

Turkey's mode of operation was widely seen by public opinion as a manifestation of her loyalty to those agreements bearing her signature and as a departure from the practise of unilateral renunciation of treaties according to the recent example given by fascist Germany.²²

The Soviet Union's position was thus basically that of 1923. For reasons of defence the Straits should be closed to the warships of non-riparian powers, while they should be open for the fleets of the Black Sea Powers, Russia's in particular, should vessels be required in a different area. The Franco-Soviet pact, theoretically at least, could be made more credible if the Soviet Union was permitted to move units of its fleet as required without fear of a threatening enemy presence in the Black Sea.²³

The naval realities of the situation did not prevent the Soviet delegate at Montreux behaving as if the USSR of the 1930's was the naval power it has become since 1945.²⁴ Litvinov's opening speech, however, placed more emphasis on the defensive importance of the Straits to the Soviet Union:

the Soviet Union's special interest arising from its geographical situation, from the lack of communication between the seas which wash its shores, and above all, from its unceasing anxiety to see universal peace encompassed by the maximum guarantees.

Litvinov continued, somewhat anatomically,

If...the Straits are the heart of Turkey and the lungs of Roumania, then for the Soviet Union they

²² G.Mikhailov, "Novii rezhim prolivov", Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo (Moscow, 1936) No.5, p.79.

²³ The Soviet Navy was to enjoy almost total numerical superiority in the Black Sea during World War II. The Italian Navy never attempted to negotiate the Straits in force which was less a result of Italian respect for the Montreux Convention than the obvious difficulty of undertaking such an operation without the cooperation of Turkey. M.G.Saunders, ed., "The Soviet Navy", (London, 1958), pp.44-73.

²⁴ However, the advantages which the Montreux Convention gave to the Soviet Union have been somewhat lessened by the advent of nuclear-weapon carrying naval vessels. See, J.Erickson, "Soviet Naval Presence in the Mediterranean: capabilities, commitments and constraints. Seaborne Threat to Israel?", Bulletin of Soviet and East European Jewish Affairs, No.3, January 1969, p.14.

represent a vital nerve uniting different parts of our country.²⁵

Great Britain was seen as the most likely obstacle to any revision of the Straits Convention in favour of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Government rightly diagnosed a certain hostility towards the USSR on the part of Great Britain. However, this was exaggerated into the familiar spectre of the Western democracies deflecting German and Italian aggression towards the east:

The position of England was defined first of all by the anti-Soviet direction of her foreign policy. The aims of which consisted of making agreements with the aggressive states, Germany and Italy, and the creation of the four power pact of European States - Italy, Germany, France and England under the leading role of the latter. The British Government tried to turn the threat of German aggression from itself and to direct it against the Soviet Union.²⁶

The British Government was indeed almost as disturbed by the remote vision of a Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean as by the actual Italian naval build-up in the same area, but seemed far from anxious to join a united front formed by France, the USSR and the Balkan and Little Ententes, let alone any new version of a four power pact. The Soviet Government however had interpreted the Anglo-German naval agreement of June 1935 as an attempt to bottle up the Soviet Baltic fleet by creating "in the Baltic sea, at the gates of the Soviet Union, a new means of aggression",²⁷ and assumed that this

²⁵ Degras, Vol.III, p.191. For a full account of the Conference, see, "Actes de la Conférence de Montreux concernant le régime des Détroits, 22 juin - 20 juillet, 1936. Compte rendu des séances plénières et proces-verbal des débats du Comité technique." (Liege, 1936). See also, "Vneshnyaya politika SSSR", TIV, No.114-A, quoted in Dranov, "Chernomorskie prolivi", p.204.

²⁶ Popov, "Konferentsiya v Montre 1936 goda", p.50. See, ibid, p.51, where Popov states that Britain aimed to disrupt Franco-Soviet relations.

²⁷ Ibid, p.51. Popov quotes Togliatti at the XVII Comintern Congress - "O zadachakh Kommunisticheskogo Internationala v svyazi s podgotovkoi imperialistami novoi mirovoi voini", (Moscow, 1935), p.40.

would be Britain's aim with regard to the Black Sea. A clash of interests between the Soviet Union and Great Britain was almost inevitable.

All the signatory Powers of the Lausanne Convention, plus the USSR and Yugoslavia and with the exception of Italy, met at Montreux, Switzerland, on June 22nd 1936. The British delegation was headed by Lord Stanhope,²⁸ the French by Paul-Boncour²⁹ and the Soviet by Litvinov. No sooner had the Conference begun than it became apparent that the Turks had changed their request for revision of the demilitarisation clauses of the Lausanne Convention, to one for a reconsideration of the Convention as a whole.³⁰ On handing the Turkish note of April 11th 1936 to Eden, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Turkish Ambassador in London, made it clear that "the main desideratum of the Turkish Government was to obtain the right to re-fortify the Straits."³¹

The modification of the Turkish attitude was almost certainly the result of Soviet pressure and the Turkish Government was not unaware that British and Soviet views were

²⁸ Lord Stanhope, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office.

²⁹ Paul-Boncour, Permanent French delegate to the League of Nations.

³⁰ The French seemed to have been aware of the full scope of the Turkish request. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.74. Flandin to Ambassadors in London, Rome, Athens, Belgrade, Sofia, Bucharest and Moscow, April 15th 1936. See also, FRUS, 1936, Vol.III, pp.514-518. Memorandum by the Ambassador (MacMurray) of a Conversation with the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs (Aras), April 22nd 1936. Aras told MacMurray that he expected difficulties only over the question of the passage of warships and aircraft. It would thus appear that Aras had deliberately not told Britain the whole story until the Conference had started its work.

³¹ "Narrative of the Negotiations at the Conference held at Montreux" by P.J.Henniker-Heaton (private secretary to Lord Stanley). PRO,FO371/20080, E5074/26/44, p.1. (Hereinafter: Narrative).

likely to differ at Montreux.³² To this end Rüstü Aras, the Turkish Foreign Minister, spoke to Eden at Geneva on the subject of the regulations regarding the passage of warships through the Straits, which the Turkish Minister wanted to be "as far as possible worked out in the first instance with His Majesty's Government", as he realised that

the general policy of His Majesty's Government is to secure maximum possible freedom of passage. Policy of Soviet Union on the other hand is maximum restriction of passage, though they (Turks) are prepared to go some way to meet the desiderata of His Majesty's Government. M. Aras professes to wish to find a compromise on the lines suggested above.³³

The success of the whole conference at Montreux eventually came to depend on the finding of a compromise between the Soviet and British points of view, as Lord Stanhope, head of the British delegation realised on the opening day of the Conference:

I have the impression that present question is assuming increasingly Anglo-Russian character and that we should do well to make utmost possible concessions to the Turks in all points of detail if we are to secure their co-operation in preventing Russians having matters very much their own way.³⁴

The British position with regard to the Straits had changed very little since the signing of the Lausanne Convention in 1923.

³² See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.433. Lescuyer to Delbos, July 14th 1936. It later transpired that the Turks seemed to have been under something of a misapprehension with regard to the British attitude. Lescuyer observed that "it was thought that agreement had been reached with London before the opening of the Conference, and now it appears that the British counter-proposals diverge considerably from Turkey's first proposals, and which plainly contradict certain points considered to be of the greatest importance by the Government in Ankara."

³³ Eden, Geneva, May 12th 1936. PRO, FO371/20073, E2680/26/44.

³⁴ Stanhope, Montreux, June 22nd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3748/26/44. At a Cabinet meeting on June 17th, Stanhope had anticipated four days preliminary discussion at Montreux, followed by technical deliberations principally concerning the Admiralty. He then hoped he might be able to return home. CAB 23/84, June 17th 1936. For French comments on the first Anglo-Soviet clash, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.348. Ponsot to Delbos, June 24th 1936. Ponsot, the French Ambassador at Ankara, was seconded to Montreux as one of the French delegates.

Basically the British Government wanted entry and exit through the Straits to be as free as possible at all times, as George W. Rendel, Head of the Eastern Department, pointed out on April 24th: "Generally speaking, however, it seems to me that what we should aim at is to secure the absolute minimum of change in the Straits Convention."³⁵

A second reason for wishing to maintain the Lausanne Convention as near as possible to its original form, was the fear that Germany might interpret any new restriction of passage into the Black Sea, or any unlimited passage of Soviet warships out of the Black Sea, as an excuse to abrogate the Anglo-German Naval Treaty to which the British Government attached considerable importance. There was indeed a certain difference of opinion between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty. For instance, when the question seemed to be one purely of remilitarization of the Straits, the Admiralty took the view that:

from the military standpoint the disadvantages of complete militarization in the Straits are outweighed by the importance of Turkish friendship with Great Britain...vis-à-vis the USSR therefore, we have everything to gain by Turkish friendship and by remilitarization of the Straits. In this respect it is thought that Turkish policy would march with ours, since Turkey is opposed to any extension of Soviet influence on her borders.³⁶

This was a view upon which Vansittart minuted his disapproval.³⁷ In general the Foreign Office adopted a more realistic attitude than the Admiralty, whose opposition crystallised over the right of non-Black Sea Powers to send their ships through the Straits in the proportions allotted at Lausanne. Rendel gave the Foreign Office view:

³⁵ Minute by Rendel, April 24th 1936, PRO, FO371/20073, E2025/26/44.

³⁶ Admiralty Memorandum, January 13th 1936, PRO, FO371/20072, E269/26/44.

³⁷ See, *ibid.*, January 17th 1936.

The policy on which we at the F.O. have hitherto been proceeding has been based on the principle that if we meet Turkey half way over her present proposals, and adopt a generous attitude towards her, we shall gain a political advantage in the direction of securing her general sympathy and future support which should more than outweigh any precarious treaty right to send a few extra ships through the Straits.³⁸

An exchange of views along these lines between the Foreign Office and the Admiralty continued, the latter even suggesting that any discussion of the Straits problem be postponed until at least the autumn of 1936.³⁹ Once again Rendel argued that the realities of the situation be faced lest Great Britain find herself, "in a position of isolation and separated from the Turks instead of working in harmony with them".⁴⁰ The Admiralty were anxious to ensure that the regulations for passage would be such that if the necessity arose they would be able to send a force into the Black Sea - a force equal to that of the strongest navy in that sea, and thus be in a position to exercise effective sea power (as under the Lausanne Convention). Eventually the British delegation to Montreux set out with instructions to aim at an agreement on this basis. That in time of war, Turkey being neutral, any limitation on the number of warships allowed to pass through the Straits should not be applicable to any belligerent Power "to the prejudice of its belligerent rights in the Black Sea". It was realised that this would require a very elaborate set of regulations and would inevitably meet with opposition from other Powers.⁴¹

³⁸ Minute by Rendel, May 18th 1936, PRO, FO371/20073, E2796/26/44.

³⁹ Minute by Rendel, May 25th 1936, PRO, FO371/20074, E3009/26/44.

⁴⁰ Memorandum by Rendel, May 28th 1936, PRO, FO371/20074, E3088/26/44.

⁴¹ See, Narrative, p.2.

It was also clear even at this early stage, that the French would be unlikely to support the British position, both for reasons of their Soviet-French mutual assistance pact, and because of the resentment felt at Britain's "betrayal" of France and the Versailles system by her signing of the Anglo-German Naval Treaty. A minute by Baggallay⁴² of June 20th, referred to reports from Montreux which indicated "that the French Delegation will not oppose the Soviet Delegation over anything".⁴³

There is no available evidence to show whether the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a similar debate with the Soviet Navy, although Soviet sources were aware of the desires and fears of the British Admiralty, especially should a possible Soviet presence in the Mediterranean induce the Germans to implement "clause de sauvegarde" in the Anglo-German Naval Agreement.⁴⁴ According to Mikhailov, the Soviet delegation to Montreux was motivated by the following aims:

firstly to take into full account the interests of Turkish security; secondly, to guarantee peace in the Black Sea, taking into account the security interests of all Black Sea Powers, one of which, namely the USSR, is forced to defend its security not only in the Black Sea.⁴⁵

The interests of Turkish security in fact concerned Moscow only in so far as they did not conflict with Russian requirements, as is revealed by this Soviet comment on the first Turkish plan for a new Straits Convention: "However

⁴² Herbert Lacy Baggallay, a First Secretary at the Foreign Office.

⁴³ Minute by Baggallay, June 20th 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3695/26/44.

⁴⁴ The Agreement contained an escape clause should "the general equilibrium of naval armaments" be violently upset. An article in *Izvestia*, July 17th 1936 (Litvinov's birthday) discussed the difference of opinion between the Admiralty and the Foreign Office. See also, Mikhailov, Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo, 1936, No.5, p.81.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.82.

friendly present Soviet-Turkish relations may be, it was clear that this Turkish suggestion did not take into sufficient account the interests of the USSR".⁴⁶ This statement contrasts with the declared intentions of the USSR with regard to Turkish demands for revision. No doubt the Soviet Union was once more being more Turkish than the Turks in its efforts for "the creation of a just international-legal regime for the Black Sea Straits".⁴⁷

When the Turks presented their draft convention to the Conference at Montreux, the proposals concerning the passage of warships through the Straits differed in important respects from previous Turkish requests, principally in that the differentiation of treatment between Black Sea and non-Black Sea warships was much more stringent. This modification of the Turkish plan was almost certainly the result of pressure from the Soviet Union. Stanhope reported that, "These new proposals are evidently consequent upon difficulties made by the Russians and represent efforts to meet Russia's point of view".⁴⁸

It was proposed that non-riparian Powers should be able to send only a total of 28,000 tons into the Black Sea with a limit of stay set at fifteen days. On the other hand no tonnage limit was to be imposed on the Black Sea Powers' right of passage into the Mediterranean. Special provision was also to be made enabling Turkey to permit the passage in either direction of one unaccompanied unit of up to 25,000 tons of the "existing" fleet of a Black Sea Power.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.81.

⁴⁷ Dranov, "Chernomorskie Prolivi", p.286.

⁴⁸ Stanhope, Montreux, June 23rd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3712/26/44.

⁴⁹ An obvious reference to the obsolete Soviet battleship "Parizhskaya Kommuna" of 25,000 tons. For details of this vessel see, J.Meister, "The Soviet Navy", pp.27-29.

The Russians subsequently claimed the right to send their 25,000 ton unit through the Straits in either direction irrespective of Turkish authorisation. Stanhope realised that the British position was a difficult one and that Turkey was under considerable Turkish pressure.⁵⁰

All delegates accepted the Turkish draft as a basis for discussion, although as Stanhope feared, the Russians emphasised the special position of the riparian Powers "and claimed the freedom of passage in both directions for all naval forces of the Soviet Union, including those from the Baltic".⁵¹

With French support, the Soviet Union also expressed the desire for special provisions to cover the passage of warships arising out of action taken as a result of obligations contracted under the Covenant of the League of Nations and regional pacts within its framework.⁵² Clearly the Soviet proposals were in almost complete contradiction to the desires of the British delegation. Litvinov expressed some concern over this Anglo-Soviet divergence of opinion to Lord Stanhope on the evening of June 22nd. Litvinov's position was that as the Black Sea was a "mare clausum" there was no reason for any warship of a non-riparian Power to be in the area, except under League auspices, and that any other reason would indicate

⁵⁰ Stanhope, Montreux, June 22nd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3748/26/44.

⁵¹ Stanhope, Montreux, June 23rd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3759/26/44.

⁵² Litvinov had told Paul-Boncour on June 24th, that if it came to a choice between complete closure of the Black Sea and any wider reciprocal access for warships coming from the Mediterranean, then he would not hesitate to opt for closure of the Straits, renouncing the right of passage of Russian ships into the Mediterranean. In response to a remark by Paul-Boncour concerning pacts of assistance, Litvinov maintained that even in this case it might be better for the USSR to renounce its rights of passage in return for the total closure of the Straits. As Ponsot noted, "All of the Soviet delegate's comments in session have been inspired by this central idea which had been Chicherin's at Lausanne 13 years ago." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.358. Ponsot to Delbos, June 25th 1936.

aggressive intentions on the part of the Power concerned.

Litvinov also showed some anxiety with regard to the expansion-
ist Powers:

He made no secret of his nervousness of the
consequences should Japan, Germany or Italy acquire
the right each to send a fleet into the Black Sea
equal to the total Russian fleet...⁵³

Aware of the British isolation at Montreux, Stanhope felt
that some modification of British aims should be made, perhaps
in case Britain was also seen as an opponent of the League, in
addition to her rather awkward position where regional pacts
and collective security were concerned.

I suggest that in these circumstances it may be
preferable to accept increased limitations on entry
into the Black Sea if thereby we can secure some
limitations on entry into the Mediterranean rather
than to continue to work for increased freedom of
entry into the Black Sea at the cost of absence of
all limitation on entry into the mediterranean⁵⁴

Sir Robert Vansittart agreed with Stanhope's assessment:

Conclusion we have reached is therefore that there is
no advantage in resisting Russian claim for freedom
of egress, and that main requirements of H.M.G. is to
secure not equality with Russia but maximum degree of
freedom for the British fleet to pass into Black Sea
particularly in time of war.⁵⁵

This exchange of opinions on the British side was a clear
indication of the strength of the Soviet position at Montreux.
The Balkan States and France supported the USSR, while Turkey
was proving to be a distinctly unsatisfactory potential ally,
more susceptible to Soviet pressure than British goodwill.
Thus Britain had either to gradually yield to the desires of
the majority, or risk wrecking the Conference with all the
opprobrium such a course would entail. Vansittart concluded

⁵³ Stanhope, Montreux, June 23rd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075,
E3798/26/44.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Vansittart to Stanhope, June 25th 1936. PRO, FO371/20075,
E3839/26/44.

his telegram by instructing Stanhope to oppose the Russian demands only in so far as it would create a bargaining position for Britain to gain as much freedom of entry as possible. The British delegation were coming to the conclusion that agreement would more likely be reached by means of a sliding yardstick scheme for entry and egress through the Straits.

In a conversation with Rendel, Menemencioglu complained that the Soviet attitude "was at complete variance with the undertaking that the Turkish Government had previously reached with them in discussions at Angora", and went on to stress that the Turkish aim was to secure a general limitation of all naval forces in the Black Sea "and not to convert it into a Russian lake with themselves merely acting as doorkeepers for Russia."⁵⁶ Menemencioglu therefore suggested that the Black Sea fleets might be effectively limited by a sliding yardstick,⁵⁷ increasing the non-Black Sea tonnage allowed through the Straits parallel with increases in Black Sea fleets. He also raised no objection to League-authorized forces passing through the Straits, although he expressed strong reservations about the Franco-Russian claims to send each other naval aid in advance of any League decision. At this point on June 26th, the Conference suspended its plenary sessions in order to allow some of the delegates to attend the League Assembly at Geneva. (This was the Extraordinary Session of the Assembly responsible for the lifting of sanctions on Italy). The British delegation used this opportunity to prepare a revised draft convention

⁵⁶ Stanhope, Montreux, June 26th 1936, PRO, FO371/20075, E3894/26/44.

⁵⁷ Although the original Turkish yardstick suggestion, their own fleet, had been dropped. "It is clearly only at the instance of Russia that they have now abandoned the latter proposal." Stanhope, Montreux, June 24th 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3807/26/44.

after consultation with the Secretary of State and some of the other delegates at Geneva.⁵⁸

Litvinov used the same opportunity to publish a statement clarifying the Soviet position:

the proposals of the Soviet Delegation do not aim at upsetting the principles laid down in the Lausanne Convention, but tend rather to their developments in harmony with those very changes in the international situation, which prompted the revision of the Lausanne Convention. The demands of the Black Sea States for greater security of their shores does not injure the interests of other States, which are given freedom of passage into the Black Sea, within reasonable limits, for all peaceful purposes.⁵⁹

After only five days at Montreux the situation for the British Government was far from satisfactory. The Admiralty in particular was very distressed at the idea of a marauding Soviet fleet having access to the Mediterranean. This was apparent from the following note made on Article 6(h) of the Turkish project: "Thus not only can a Black Sea Power send an unlimited force into the Mediterranean and back, but it can send an unlimited force into the Black Sea from e.g. the Baltic".⁶⁰

When the Montreux Conference re-assembled on July 6th 1936, Lord Stanley⁶¹ had replaced Lord Stanhope as head of the British delegation. Stanley presented the new British draft convention. This was an attempt at a more realistic approach to the Straits problem, although despite the concessions made

⁵⁸ For the French evaluation of the position reached by June 26th, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.389. Captain Lelaquet to General Gamelin, July 4th 1936. Lelaquet was one of the French delegates at Montreux. Gamelin was the Chief of Staff of the French Army.

⁵⁹ Copy of a statement by Litvinov. June 25th 1936. PRO, F0371/20075, E3901/26/44.

⁶⁰ Note by G.G.Fitzmaurice (Third Legal Adviser at the Foreign Office), Montreux, June 25th 1936. PRO, F0371/20075, E3866/26/44. The German Navy shared this view, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.V. No.459.

⁶¹ Lord Stanley, Parliamentary and Financial Secretary to the Admiralty. According to Dell, Lord Stanley told British correspondents at his Press reception that he knew nothing about the question of the Straits. Dell, "The Geneva Racket", p.250.

to the Turks it would still have had the effect of bottling up the Soviet Black Sea Fleet and of preventing the French from sending naval aid to Roumania or the Soviet Union in the event of hostilities. The draft was accepted as a new basis for discussion at the plenary session on July 6th. Among the concessions made by the draft was the acceptance of a period of notice for ships in transit through the Straits, and a fixed total tonnage of 30,000 tons with a limited period of stay in the Black Sea for warships of all non-riparian Powers, although there was provision for an increase to 45,000 tons in the event that Black Sea fleets be increased.

The new draft also accepted a tonnage limit equal to half the tonnage of the effective Turkish fleet. The "Marmara Yardstick" were a limit of a minimum of 15,000 tons on warships passing through the Straits at any one time, and this tonnage was not to be composed of more than nine units. Submarines and military aircraft was prohibited from using the Straits and in peacetime, should Turkey feel herself urgently threatened by war she could close the Straits to belligerents. In a war involving no Black Sea Power she could also close the Straits to belligerents. Article 23 of the draft made the provisions of the convention subject to Turkish rights and duties under the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Article 16 of the draft which concerned the problem of belligerent rights became an important issue of the subsequent negotiations, and the target for wide Soviet amendments. The Soviet suggestion that "the passage through the Straits shall be prohibited for ships of war and auxiliary vessels of all belligerent states except in the cases contemplated in Article 23"

⁶² Narrative, p.3.

was opposed by the British delegation which wanted the Straits open in time of war. The Turks, in private conversation had agreed to support the United Kingdom, but presumably because of Soviet pressure the Turkish delegate failed to give the British delegation any support. Instead he announced that he was prepared to accept the Soviet amendment.

The French also objected to Article 16 of the draft on the grounds that Turkey had several treaty engagements with neighbouring Powers involving various obligations of assistance against aggression and that these might prejudice Turkey's absolute neutrality.

A further difference of opinion arose between the Soviet and British delegations. Litvinov wanted to make the "yardstick" less favourable for non-riverain Powers than provided for in the British draft. He also wished to include an amendment limiting Non-Black Sea warships passing through the Straits to "light surface vessels" - a suggestion which the British feared might give Germany cause for objection as discriminating against her pocket battleships.

Litvinov also wanted preferential treatment for Black Sea Powers with regard to the prior notification to the Turkish Government for passage through the Straits. The Turks complained to Rendel that the proposed Soviet amendment carried too heavy a responsibility for Turkey:

Under the United Kingdom draft, Turkey had the right, if she felt her security menaced, to close the Straits to all belligerents; it would be quite another thing for her to be found, as in the Soviet amendment, to take possible forcible action against a Power with whom she had no quarrel, and also not being a signatory of the Convention, might not regard itself as being bound by it.⁶³

⁶³ Narrative, p.5.

When the next plenary meeting took place, the Soviet delegate tabled an amendment to Article 23 which in effect provided for freedom of passage, not only for warships fulfilling their obligations under League auspices, but also for those fulfilling mutual assistance pacts concluded within the framework of the League, whether Turkey was a party to this or not. In the discussion which followed, Britain foresaw many difficulties with this amendment, though the French announced that without this provision they would not sign the convention. All the other delegates, except the Japanese, supported the Soviet proposal, and even the Turks were reluctant to take a strong line against Russia. The united front of Litvinov, Paul-Boncour and Titulescu⁶⁴ forced the British delegation to seek further instructions from the Foreign Office on the question of these regional pacts, as a breakdown of the conference seemed to be increasingly imminent. After an impassioned outburst by the excitable M. Titulescu, accusing Britain of trying to wreck the Balkan Entente and the Franco-Roumanian alliance, the conference concluded its first reading of the British draft, and plenary sessions were suspended on July 9th to allow delegations to consult their Governments.

A period of private conversations, negotiations and visits between the principal delegations followed. The Russians eventually agreed to leave article 23 unchanged in return for adoption of the Soviet amendment to article 16, that Soviet

⁶⁴ For details of the links between Litvinov and Titulescu at Montreux, see, Oprea, "Nicolae Titulescu's Diplomatic Activity", pp.102-106. Titulescu lost his post as Foreign Minister on August 29th 1936, in a Cabinet reorganisation occasioned by growing opposition to his alleged pro-Russian and pro-League policies. See, Survey 1936, pp.522-524.

wishes concerning light surface vessels and the escorts of large riverain warships be included. Eventually the position was reached where the Russians with Turkish, French and Roumanian support took the line that the Straits should normally be closed in time of war, Turkey being neutral, subject to rights and obligations under the League, and pacts to which Turkey was a party. The British delegation maintained that the Straits should normally be open to both belligerents unless Turkey decided to close them to both, or when provisions of the League Covenant or one of the pacts to which Turkey was a party, entitled her to discriminate.

This position of deadlock threatened the Conference with breakdown unless either Britain on one hand, or the USSR, France, Roumania, Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey on the other, gave way.⁶⁵ Following the now familiar pattern, the British delegation, in consultation with the Foreign Office, decided that the consequences of a breakdown at Montreux could well be more unfavourable to British interests than conditions then obtainable. Indeed it was quite likely that if a convention was not agreed upon, Turkey would simply unilaterally dispense with the Lausanne Convention and institute her own regulations for passage through the Straits, possibly with more Soviet influence than would suit the Foreign Office. Thus, after further exchanges with the Foreign Office, on July 15th, the United Kingdom delegation was instructed to

agree to the solution of the closure of the Straits to all belligerents in time of war, Turkey being neutral subject to rights and obligations under the Covenant of League and under the pacts to which Turkey was or might become a party, concluded within the framework of the

⁶⁵ See, Borisov, "Sovetskoe-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya, 1929-1945", pp.320-321.

covenant of the League and registered and published in accordance with the provisions of article 18 of the Covenant.⁶⁶

Following this final British concession, agreement on a convention was assured, and after a number of secondary points had been dealt with, the new convention was officially signed on July 20th 1936.

As far as the League of Nations and collective security were concerned, the new Straits Convention signed at Montreux was something of a two-edged sword. True, it was a peaceful and successful solution of a complex problem, which was welcomed after the series of 'faits accomplis' by Germany, Italy and Japan. However, this peaceful revision of an international treaty did in fact return an area once under international control to the control of one nation, just as surely as if Turkey had followed Hitler's example in the Rhineland, for whatever the actual provisions of the Montreux Convention, Turkey was now in physical control of the Straits.⁶⁷

The support which the major Powers gave to Turkey's initial request for revisions of the Lausanne Convention was in each case based on purely national considerations, although the attempts by Paul-Boncour, Litvinov, and Titulescu to make the Convention cater for the requirements of regional pacts, in particular the Franco-Soviet pact, had a wider aim in which (despite British opposition) they were successful. As Dell pointed out, this diplomatic victory

ought to have convinced the Blum Cabinet that, as the experience of Barthou in 1934 had already shown, it was possible to hold out against the British Foreign

⁶⁶ Narrative, p.7. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.456. Ponsot to Delbos, July 16th 1936.

⁶⁷ François-Poncet, the French Ambassador in Berlin, noted that Germany had seen the Turkish request for revision of the Straits Convention as a justification for their own action in the Rhineland. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.77. François-Poncet to Flandin, April 15th 1936. Strangely, Turkey saw the German remilitarisation of the Rhineland as the justification for their own request for revision of the Lausanne Convention.

Office, given the necessary courage and determination, and that France was not obliged to follow blindly in the wake of England.⁶⁸

However, French diplomatic independence of London proved to be a phenomenon which did not long survive the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

For Litvinov at least, even the calling of the Montreux Conference represented a vindication of the policy of collective security and a certain strengthening of the League. As he had remarked on June 23rd:

I should like to remind the conference that we should not forget the League of Nations. The League of Nations is not dead, it still exists and will emerge from its difficulties stronger and more vigorous than ever.⁶⁹

As far as Great Britain was concerned, the Conference was a success only in that it marked the beginning of a period of closer Anglo-Turkish friendship,⁷⁰ for it had proved impossible to effectively counter the pressure which the Soviet Union, with the support of France and Roumania, had exerted from Turkey. The official British summing-up cannot disguise the fact that to all intents and purposes the Black Sea was now a Soviet lake:

The principle of the freedom of the Straits has been re-asserted without limit of time. The Straits Commission has only been abandoned in return for an under-taking by Turkey, in form proposed by the British delegation, that Turkey will furnish signatory Powers with even more information than was formally supplied by the commission. Commerical Clauses have been obtained which are in many ways more satisfactory than those of the old convention. Though the conditions for warships passing through the Straits are much more stringent in the new convention, the conditions obtained for peacetime are far better than those proposed by the

⁶⁸ Dell, "The Geneva Racket", p.253.

⁶⁹ Degras, Vol.III, p.194.

⁷⁰ For expressions of Turkish pleasure at the excellent state of relations with Great Britain, see, Lorraine to Eden, July 20th 1936. PRO, FO371/20079, E4583/26/44, and, Lorraine to Eden, July 28th 1936. PRO, FO371/20079, E4823/26/44. See also, Eden, pp.420-421.

Turks at the beginning of the conference, and attempts to convert the Black Sea into a 'mare clausum' have been successfully resisted. The Soviet Union had been prevailed upon to accept reciprocity of limitation, and, although the United Kingdom delegation were obliged to abandon their claim for full belligerent rights as normally recognised by international law, the delegation had gained what is probably a far more important point in securing acceptance of the principle that the only overriding obligations entitling Turkey to discriminate between belligerents shall be those deriving from the League Covenant, or pacts within the framework of that Covenant, to which Turkey is a party. Finally, the excellent atmosphere in which the agreement was eventually obtained cannot be without good effect in international relations in a wider sphere.⁷¹

These conclusions ignore the fact that the British delegation at Montreux was not only forced to concede almost every major point to the USSR and her supporters, but managed to compound the damage done to British diplomatic credibility by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement,⁷² by its consistent concern for the effects of any new Straits convention on Germany, a concern which earned Britain a bad press both abroad and at home.⁷³ The possible effect of the Montreux Convention on the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was a constant pre-occupation of the British Government.⁷⁴ At a Cabinet meeting of

⁷¹ Narrative, p.8.

⁷² See above, p.113, footnote 116. For the French reaction to this Agreement, see, A.Geraud ("Pertinax"), "France and the Anglo-German Naval Treaty", Foreign Affairs, October 1935, No.1, pp.51-61.

⁷³ See, Izvestia, July 15th 1936, for a report on a critical Manchester Guardian article of the 13th. On July 11th, Izvestia quoted the "Journal des Nations": "In Montreux the impression has been created that one of the aims of the British delegation is to reduce the pacts of mutual assistance to nothing. Unbiased observers conclude that by attacking these pacts the English are evidently trying to make negotiations with Germany easier." For French disapproval of the British attitude, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.421. Ponsot to Delbos, July 10th 1936.

⁷⁴ For details of Anglo-German contacts, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, Nos. 417, 421, 431, 445, 448, 453, 456, 529, and 633. Britain strove to reassure Germany that Montreux was no reason to alter the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and that the new Convention was not directed against Germany. The Germans decided to make use of the British fears as a bargaining counter, see, *ibid*, No.462.

July 15th, the Admiralty posed the question,

Whether it was worthwhile to run the risk of losing the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in order to avoid a breakdown of negotiations for a very dubious treaty from which the Italians, who certainly ought to be a party were excluded.⁷⁵

The Cabinet decided to make concessions at Montreux, while giving full explanations of their actions to the Germans. That the Soviet Government was aware of this was shown by an editorial in Izvestia which made much capital out of the attitude of, "that part of the English government" which feared a German renunciation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement.⁷⁶

By contrast with the British position, the Soviet Union had, with the support of France and Roumania, scored a considerable diplomatic victory with important strategic implications:

Despite a number of faults in the convention its adoption was of great positive significance and was an important victory for Soviet diplomacy in that recognition was gained for the special rights of Black Sea Powers with regard to the passage of their ships through the Straits. The adoption of the Soviet suggestion had great significance for the maintenance of peace in the Black Sea area.⁷⁷

In general, Soviet treatment of the Montreux Conference tends to explain the USSR's interests in the Straits in terms of its support for collective security, and the benefits which the revision of the Straits Convention brought to the other Black Sea Powers, rather than in terms of Russian strategic interests:

The interest of the Soviet Union in the problem of the Straits is explained by the following circumstances:

⁷⁵ CAB 23/85, July 15th 1936.

⁷⁶ Izvestia, July 21st 1936.

⁷⁷ Alekseev and Kerimov, "Vneshnyaya politika Turtsii", p.34. Compare the relevant clauses of the Montreux Convention (Appendix No.4) with those of the Lausanne Convention (Appendix No.1).

in the 1930s the Foreign policy of the USSR was based on the principle of the prevention of war by the organisation of collective security. The Soviet Union considered that the problem of the Straits should be solved in a manner which would create the best conditions for states who in accordance with the principles of collective security and the Covenant of the League of Nations, would rebuff the aggressor.⁷⁸

Turkey, however, was deemed to be guilty of favouring the interests of the imperialist powers, Great Britain in particular, and ignoring those of the USSR. When the Turkish delegation had suggested that there be some limit on the tonnage of riverain Powers allowed to pass out of the Black Sea, Pravda had countered:

It is clear that the Turkish suggestion does not take into sufficient account the interests of the USSR which has friendly relations with Turkey and always takes her interests into account.... It is no less clear, that this was the expression of pressure on Turkish policy of influence hostile to the USSR.⁷⁹

This is still more explicitly stated by a more recent source.

Despite the ambiguous position of Turkey, who supported the British demands on almost all basic questions, the firm position of the Soviet Union helped in the working out at the new Conference of a new text.⁸⁰

Although it is clear that British concessions, rather than the attitude of the Soviet Government, were responsible for success at Montreux, this is ignored in most Soviet commentaries, "The Soviet Government tried to save the conference from collapse, which would have given Hitler an unnecessary trump-card in his aggressive policy."⁸¹ This is an interesting comment in view of the pressure which the Soviet Union put on Turkey for her own ends. An article in Izvestia, on July 2nd, pointed out

⁷⁸ Popov, "Konferentsia v Montre 1936 goda", p.50.

⁷⁹ Pravda, July 1st 1936.

⁸⁰ Trukhanovsky "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR 1917-1939", Vol. I, p.454.

⁸¹ Diplomaticheskii Slovar, (Moscow 1961), pp.312-314..

that the interests of the USSR lay in having freedom of egress, and that the achievement of a result favourable to the USSR and the other Black Sea Powers "will correspond more with the interests of Turkey herself, and in our opinion is profoundly related to the strengthening of the general peace".⁸² However, despite what in Soviet eyes was Turkish unreliability, "The activity of Soviet diplomacy once again confirmed that our government always pays the greatest attention to the interests of Turkey and Soviet-Turkish co-operation."⁸³

The absence of Soviet archival material makes it more difficult to assess exactly how much pressure was put on the Turkish delegation at Montreux, or on the Turkish Government in Ankara. The British Foreign Office archives covering the Montreux Conference however, make frequent reference to such Soviet pressure on the Turks, from the earliest days of the Conference until its conclusion. That the Soviet Government had a somewhat paternalistic attitude is evident from the previously quoted press articles. It is further confirmed by an interview between Chilston and Litvinov in Moscow on April 17th 1936. The latter expressed his dissatisfaction at the timing of the Turkish request for remilitarisation of the Straits:

M. Litvinov appeared to be displeased and disgruntled with the sudden action of the Turkish M(inister of) F(oreign) A(ffairs) who, he said, had wanted to bring up the matter already (group omitted) last month in London, but he M. Litvinov, had dissuaded him.⁸⁴

⁸² Izvestia, July 2nd 1936.

⁸³ Popov, "Konferentsia v Montre 1936 goda", p.61.

⁸⁴ Chilston to Eden, April 17th 1936. PRO, FO371/20073, E2078/26/44. Litvinov expressed similar views to the French and though making it clear that the USSR supported the Turkish request in principle, he was apprehensive lest its timing awoke other revisionist tendencies in the Balkans and Central Europe. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.95. Payart to Flandin, April 19th 1936.

This irritation did not prevent the Soviet Government from warmly endorsing the Turkish request, and their influence on events at Montreux soon made itself apparent. Stanhope reported that the Turkish draft convention "represented efforts to meet the Russian point of view."⁸⁵ Aras had told him the previous day that he was meeting with further difficulties from the Russians who were claiming the absolute right to send a fleet unit of 25,000 tons through the Straits in either direction on any occasion, irrespective of Turkish authorisation.⁸⁶ Lord Stanhope suggested that it would be best for British interests to secure the co-operation of the Turks in all points of detail lest the Russians have their own way. Whether the Turks were being sincere in their remarks to Stanhope or not is impossible to judge, but as the Conference assumed an increasingly Anglo-Russian nature the Turks receded into the background, apart from their complaints to the British that the Soviet Union was not acting in accordance with previously given understandings at Ankara.⁸⁷

On another occasion, Aras explained to Eden that his country's policy was to be in the fullest accord with Great Britain and the USSR, clearly a very difficult task,⁸⁸ for no matter how much the Turks may have tried to maintain this middle course they were increasingly forced to demur to Soviet pressure. Litvinov even felt able to speak for Turkey:

⁸⁵ Stanhope, Montreux, June 23rd 1936, PRO, FO371/20075, E3712/26/44.

⁸⁶ Stanhope, Montreux, June 22nd 1936. PRO, FO371/20075, E3748/26/44.

⁸⁷ The German Ambassador in Ankara reported that "the preliminary consultations between Turkey and Soviet Russia in respect of the project to be presented at Montreux did not go into any great detail." DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, No.400, p.675. Keller to the Foreign Ministry, June 24th 1936.

⁸⁸ Eden, Geneva, June 28th 1936, PRO, FO371/20076, E4002/26/44.

When we speak of Turkish security we are equally speaking of the security of the Black Sea Powers to whom should be given full liberty to dispose their armed forces as they wish.⁸⁹

The extent to which the Turkish delegation actually was under Russian influence, was demonstrated during the dispute over the proposed Soviet amendment concerning regional pacts. The Turks had told the British delegation that they would oppose the Russians⁹⁰ as they claimed to be afraid of the risk involved in discriminating between belligerents who wanted to pass through the Straits. Despite this, the Turks were, as described by Rendel, "Obviously much afraid of the Russians, and indeed M. Aras gives the impression at Montreux of being almost helpless against M. Litvinov."⁹¹

The Russians openly criticised the Turks in the press, as Chilston reported from Moscow:

The USSR has the right to demand that Turkey should be as considerate of the interests of Soviet security as the Soviet Government are of Turkish security. We are profoundly convinced that it is not in Turkey's interest to refuse us the guarantee of this right (i.e. the right of unrestricted egress).⁹²

Chilston noted in the same report, that the Narkomindel had threatened that they would not aid Turkey in the event of

⁸⁹ "Compte rendu des Séances Plénières et Procès-Verbal des Débats du Comité Technique", 4^{eme} séance, June 24th 1936, p.62 (Hereinafter: "Compte rendu"), PRO, FO371/20076, E4007/26/44.

⁹⁰ Stanley, Montreux, July 8th 1936. PRO, FO371/20077, E4241/26/44.

⁹¹ Minute by Rendel, Montreux, July 11th 1936. PRO, FO371/20078, E4335/26/44. Little more than a year later, at the Nyon Conference, Litvinov and Aras found themselves once more at the same table. On this occasion, Massigli, of the French delegation commented, "it is not without interest to note the cooling of Soviet-Turkish relations, which was even manifested in the personal relations between the delegates of the two countries, and which struck all observers." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.452. Massigli to the Foreign Ministry, September 15th 1937.

⁹² Chilston to Eden, July 9th 1936. PRO, FO371/20078, E4339/26/44.

any Italian action against her, unless she proved more amenable at Montreux.

A still more revealing glimpse of Soviet diplomatic activity behind the scenes during the Conference, is given by Loraine, from Istanbul:

I greatly fear my Soviet colleague here is responsible for a certain success in (1) misrepresenting to the Turkish Government the attitude of the British Delegation at Montreux and (2) sowing some mistrust even between the Turkish Government and their own delegation at Montreux."⁹³

Judging by the extent of the Soviet success at Montreux, Karakhan, the Soviet Ambassador to Turkey, not to mention Litvinov himself, must have been very active indeed in persuading the Turks to adopt as far as possible the Soviet point of view. This is indicated by Rendel's despatch from Montreux, on July 20th, after the signing of the new Convention.⁹⁴

It now became more and more apparent that M. Aras's statement at Geneva in May that he had reached complete agreement with the Soviet Government was entirely unfounded. Indeed it seems clear that the long delay which occurred in the presentation of the Turkish proposals was due to disagreement as to their terms between the Turkish and Soviet Governments; that the Turkish Government were obliged to make important concessions to the Soviet Government from the outset; and that M. Aras in particular has been much under M. Litvinov's personal domination and that there has been practically no point on which the Turks have not been prepared to yield to Russian pressure in the last resort, whatever attitude they might previously have adopted in discussion with other delegations. This subservience of the Turkish delegation to the Soviet delegation has been one of the greatest difficulties with which the United Kingdom delegation has had to contend throughout the conference.⁹⁵

⁹³ Loraine to Eden, July 18th 1936. PRO, FO371/20079, E4569/26/44.

⁹⁴ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.433. Lescuyer to Delbos, July 14th 1936. Lescuyer reported that on July 13th, the Turks had specifically requested Soviet support as they felt that Britain was not being sufficiently sympathetic towards the Soviet position.

⁹⁵ Rendel, Montreux, July 20th 1936. PRO, FO371/20079, E4633/26/44. Rendel's comments make an amusing contrast with Chicherin's experience at Lausanne in 1923 when Ismet Pasha seemed to give in to British pressure.

On September 3rd, in reply to a letter from Loraine, Rendel once again mentioned the subservience of Aras to Litvinov: "Aras invariably crumpled up before Litvinov in a way which I can only describe as pitiable."⁹⁶

Faced by a high degree of Soviet intransigence,⁹⁷ Turkish unreliability, and the opposition of the French⁹⁸ and Roumanian delegations, the British had only two possible courses of action, to accept the responsibility for the breakdown of the conference, or to gradually concede points to the Russians, and this latter course was the one chosen, albeit reluctantly.⁹⁹

In parallel with the covert Soviet pressure on the Turks, the public stance of the Soviet delegation was one which could

⁹⁶ Letter from Rendel to Loraine, September 3rd 1936, PRO, FO371/20079, E4633/26/44. Aras seems to have been a strikingly unpopular figure. Karakhan complained to Lescuyer that Aras's behaviour towards Britain had been servile, and said that for this reason even Ataturk was irritated with Aras. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.443. Lescuyer to Delbos, July 14th 1936.

⁹⁷ Record of a Conversation between Maisky and Sir Lancelot Cliphant (Deputy Under Secretary of State), July 11th 1936. PRO, FO371/20078, E4442/26/44. Maisky told Cliphant that Litvinov's orders were to return to Moscow, if Soviet demands for free egress were not met. See also, Popov, "Konferentsiya v Montre 1936 goda", p.59. Popov quotes Soviet Foreign Policy Archives, AVP SSSR, f.010, d.42833, p.60, 1936, 11, 117, 120.

⁹⁸ The French found themselves in a position of some delicacy, as Ponsot observed in a telegram to Delbos on July 10th. "However basic our desire to help Britain may be, it seems to me impossible not to take into account the clearly expressed wishes of the USSR and Roumania. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.421. Ponsot to Delbos, July 10th 1936. See also, Borisov, "Sovetsko-Frantsuzskie otnosheniya, 1924-1945". Borisov refers to Montreux as "one of the few examples of Franco-Soviet diplomatic cooperation in the pre-war years." p.322.

⁹⁹ Eden had made it clear as early as June 30th, that "precise terms of settlement arrived at are less important to us (since Black Sea is not a vital British interest) and I believe to Europe than that settlement should speedily be reached. Effect on general international situation of postponement and possibility of failure of yet another international conference could not but be deplorable." Eden, Geneva, June 30th 1936. PRO, FO371/20076, E3965/26/44. Dell makes an amusing point at the expense of the British reluctance to accept the text prepared by Litvinov and Paul-Boncour. Dell, "The Geneva Racket", pp.252-253.

hardly be faulted. At each stage in the negotiations Litvinov was able to demonstrate Soviet support for the policy of collective security, the League and the desire for peace, while Great Britain was made to appear either indifferent or hostile to these causes.

At the first session of the Conference, Litvinov had associated specifically Soviet strategic requirements, with the concept of world peace. He stated "if we create security in one part of the world, by this means we make a large contribution to general security."¹⁰⁰ This negotiating tactic enabled Moscow to denounce any opposition to its own aims at Montreux, as opposition to the idea of peace and collective security. Similarly, when debating the question of the closure of the Straits should Turkey be neutral, Litvinov made the point that, "War is illegal and cannot become legal except by virtue of a decision of the League of Nations."¹⁰¹ This too, was intended to give moral weight to the Soviet position. In this way the Soviet case at Montreux was made to appear as one more step in the USSR's policy of halting fascist aggression by means of scrupulous adherence to the League Covenant and to the regional pacts¹⁰² of which the Soviet Union was a member. British diplomatic activity at Montreux, whatever its intentions, only confirmed the Russian interpretation of the policies of the British Government in the eyes of Moscow and its

¹⁰⁰ Compte rendu, I re séance, June 22nd 1936, p.82. PRO, FO371/20076, E4007/26/44.

¹⁰¹ Compte rendu, 9 eme séance, July 8th 1936. p.11. PRO, FO371/20078, E4299/26/44.

¹⁰² See, J.Abrevaya, "La Conference de Montreux et le régime des Détroits", (Paris, 1938), pp.103-106.

complemented Moscow's undoubted diplomatic victory.

In concrete terms, the Soviet Achievement at Montreux was something which had been a Russian aim for many years:

For Russia it accomplished what successive attempts over the course of a century had failed to bring about; control of the Black Sea by the Russian fleet, freedom for Russia to send her raiders into the Mediterranean without danger of a superior force pursuing her into the Black Sea or in any way threatening her southern shores - with the exception of a punitive action undertaken against her under the League Covenant, a contingency which seemed very unlikely in the summer of 1936.¹⁰⁴

The only blight on what was otherwise an extremely successful conference for the Soviet Union was the deterioration of Soviet-Turkish relations, which had been detected during the Conference, "The behaviour of the Turkish delegation at the Montreux Conference demonstrated that in her foreign policy Turkey was increasingly moving towards the imperialist states."¹⁰⁵ This movement was confirmed over the next three years,¹⁰⁶ as Turkey moved into the British orbit, a move which

¹⁰³ See Izvestia, July 9th 1936. "Comrade Litvinov, in his speech pointed out that the British plan could well have been put forward thirty or forty years previously, when there was neither a Kellogg-Briand Pact outlawing war, nor the Covenant of the League of Nations to provide aid for a victim of aggression."

¹⁰⁴ J.T. Shotwell and F. Déak, "Turkey at the Straits", (New York, 1940), p.27.

¹⁰⁵ Alekseev and Kerimov, "Vneshnyaya politika Turtsii", p.35. See also, Miller, "Ocherki noveishei istorii Turtsii", p.179. Miller was a member of the Soviet delegation at Montreux.

¹⁰⁶ Chilston to Eden, July 25th 1936. PRO, FO371/20080, E4883/26/44. Chilston commented, "I imagine the Soviet Government's belief in their ascendancy over the mistress of the Dardanelles has nevertheless been considerably shaken." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.II, No.412. Alphand to Delbos, July 8th 1936. "In all, the Soviets are disturbed to see the Turkish Republic taking on unaccustomed airs of independence. Above all they do not conceal their annoyance at Ankara's showing to other Powers, in particular to Britain, an intimacy of which they would have wished to retain the monopoly." See, also, FRUS, 1936, Vol.III. Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Bullitt) to the Secretary of State, April 24th 1936. The German Ambassador in Ankara, Keller, noted that Karakhan had sent a congratulatory telegram to Saracoglu rather than to Aras, which Keller felt was not "exactly a demonstration of cordial feelings." DGFP, Series C, Vol.V. No.483, p.834. Keller to the Foreign Ministry, July 28th 1936.

was interpreted as being anti-Soviet by the Russian Government, although the negotiations for the Anglo-French-Turkish mutual assistance pact, of October 19th 1939, had no such intention:

in the course of her negotiations British diplomacy considered the isolation of Turkey from the Soviet Union as one of the links of the system of anti-Soviet plans of the Western Powers on the eve of the second world war.¹⁰⁷

However this loss of Turkish friendship was a small price to pay in return for the gains of Montreux:

Despite a number of shortcomings in the convention (in particular the position of equality of Black Sea and non-Black Sea belligerent Powers when Turkey was neutral in time of war) it was of positive significance and was a Soviet diplomatic success.¹⁰⁸

The three major aims of Soviet diplomacy at Montreux as enumerated in an Izvestia editorial, on July 21st, had been,

to guarantee peace in the Black Sea... to gain for the Soviet Union the right to send Soviet ships out of the Black Sea to other bases of the Soviet fleet, and vice versa...The third principal aim, which motivated the Soviet Union at Montreux was the inclusion of the Straits treaty in the framework of the State of the League of Nations.

All this had been achieved by the Montreux Convention, the resolutions of which,

¹⁰⁷ Alekseev and Kerimov, "Vneshnyaya politika Turtsii", p.40.

¹⁰⁸ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, pp.631-632. According to a recently published Bulgarian work, after Montreux, the Turkish Government offered the USSR an additional agreement concerning the Straits and limited mutual-assistance in the Straits area in case of war involving either nation. Moscow welcomed this, but British influence forced Turkey to drop the plan. L.Zhivkova, "Anglo-turskite otnosheniya, 1933-1939" (Sofia, 1971), pp.79-82. The German Ambassador in Ankara reported news of a similar agreement on July 7th. He was informed of this by a reliable informant under conditions of strict secrecy. This agreement was supposed to have been in existence prior to the Montreux Conference. DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, No.439, p.145. Keller to the Foreign Ministry, July 7th 1936.

correspond to the vital interests of the Soviet Union in the Black Sea. They satisfy the lawful interests of our friendly ally Turkey, establishing her sovereignty over the Straits. And finally they fulfill the expectations of all those who support peace. The friends of the international organisation of collective security have won a decisive battle.¹⁰⁹

The most important aspect of the Montreux Conference, from an international point of view, was that it was a success, when failures of any form of collective action had become the rule:

The Montreux Conference was a clear confirmation of the correctness of the proposition that if two such powerful states as the Soviet Union and Great Britain negotiate between themselves, there is the possibility of deciding complicated and involved international questions. Despite the significant divergences of opinion between the Soviet Union and Britain, the delegates made efforts to co-operate, with the result that agreement was reached.¹¹⁰

Litvinov was to refer publicly to the Montreux Conference on at least two occasions in the future, as an example of how international collaboration could succeed in strengthening the security of nations.¹¹¹

At Montreux, Soviet Conference Diplomacy scored what was to be its greatest victory of the inter-war period. With the invaluable support of France and Roumania, Soviet diplomats had used a combination of covert pressure on Turkey, intransigence in negotiation and speeches directed over the heads of the other negotiations to Moscow's sympathisers abroad. By these means the Soviet Union had simultaneously secured important strategic objectives while making significant gains in the field of propaganda. The implications of the

¹⁰⁹ Izvestia, July 21st 1936.

¹¹⁰ Popov, "Konferentsiya v Montre 1936 goda", p.61.

¹¹¹ See speeches by Litvinov at the Nyon Conference, September 14th 1937, and at the eighteenth League Assembly, September 21st 1937, in Degras, Vol.III, pp.255, 257.

Montreux Convention for the policy of collective security,¹¹²
though potentially great, were not destined to bear fruit,
for the Franco-Soviet relationship never reached an intimacy
at which naval cooperation proved possible. But in the summer
of 1936, Litvinov's closing words at Montreux seemed to have
a general international relevance:

The Montreux Conference has brought the first ray
of hope. Its results encourage us to believe that
international life will soon emerge definitively
from the impasse of fruitless discussion and
controversy in which it has been caught up, and
pass into the broad ocean of true international
collaboration, finally reaching the harbour over
the entrance to which is inscribed the words "universal
peace and security for all peoples."¹¹³

If, during the period 1933-1939, a resuscitation of the Four
Power Pact was the greatest fear of the Soviet Government,
then the precedent set by the negotiations at Montreux
remained its greatest hope.¹¹⁴

¹¹² For the German evaluation of the effect of the Montreux
Convention, see, DGFP, Series C, Vol.V, Nos. 459 and 462.
The German Navy saw Montreux as a distinct deterioration
in the situation. The Foreign Ministry took the more
reasonable view, that the Convention was harmful to
German interests, only in so far as it proved of advantage
to the USSR. Italy, whose Navy threatened the stability
of the Mediterranean area, finally adhered to the
Convention, after refusing to be represented at Montreux,
on May 2nd 1938.

¹¹³ Degras, Vol.III, pp 201-202.

¹¹⁴ Alternatively, if Stalin's aim had been to strengthen his
bargaining position with regard to Nazi Germany, then
Montreux still represented a considerable strategic
improvement for the USSR.

Chapter V. Soviet attitudes and policy towards the Committee for Non-Intervention in Spanish Affairs, July 1936 - August 1937.

Before the Montreux Convention had been signed, bringing, in Litvinov's words "the first ray of hope"¹ into the gloomy European scene, a Spanish military revolt began in Morocco, on July 18th 1936, and broke out at various points all over Spain during the next day. This mutiny which rapidly developed into civil war, was to become the principal pre-occupation of the majority of the European Powers until Hitler's activities in Central Europe began to assume more menacing proportions.

While Great Britain and France watched the events in Spain with considerable disquiet, Italy responded immediately to Franco's request for aid. Mussolini seems to have seen Italy's part in the Spanish conflict as partly a crusade against Communism and partly as an attempt to secure an ally to the West of France, and thus to considerably advance Italian influence in the Mediterranean basin.²

Germany, although her military commitment never rivalled that of Italy, saw a Nationalist Spain as a useful means of isolating France strategically, and meanwhile used the opportunity of the Civil War to experiment with new military equipment and techniques. The German Ambassador to Franco, Wilhelm Faupel, summed up German hopes:

¹ Degras, Vol.III, p.201.

² For the German evaluation of the Italian attitude to the Spanish question, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, Nos. 30, 32 and 40. The Papers and diaries of the Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, give much useful information on the Italian attitude to the events in Spain. See his, "Diplomatic Papers", ed. M.Muggeridge, (London, 1948); "Diaries 1937-8", ed. M.Muggeridge, (London, 1952); "Diaries 1939-43", ed. M.Muggeridge, (London, 1947).

There is no doubt that (after) a war won because of our intervention a Spain socially ordered and economically reconstructed with our help will in the future be not only a very important source of raw materials to us, but also a faithful friend for a long time to come.³

The outbreak of the war in Spain found France in a delicate position. Blum and the Popular Front naturally sympathised with the Spanish Government,⁴ but a large section of the French population felt the opposite. Given the troubled internal situation in France, Blum dared not openly support the Spanish Government, despite his inclinations, lest he cause an irreparable split in French domestic politics. With this in mind, the French Government issued a communiqué on August 1st 1936:

The French Government is concerned to make effective all measures capable of shortening the troubles in Spain and to avoid the extension of foreign activity, the consequences of which would be prejudicial to the maintenance of good international relations.

To this end it has decided to address an urgent appeal to the principal Governments concerned with a view to the early adoption and vigorous enforcement as regards Spain, of common rules of non-intervention.⁵

This attitude of strict neutrality was shared by the British Government,⁶ and its policy of remaining absolutely

³ Ibid., No.248, p.279. Faupel to the Foreign Ministry, May 1st 1937. Both Germany and Italy were to accept the Non-Intervention Agreement, though their acceptance in no way modified their real intentions. See, *ibid.*, Nos.45, 54 and 55.

⁴ For the initial response of the French Government, and the refusal to provide arms to the Republic, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, Nos.17, 25, 30, 33, 34 and 40.

⁵ Clerk to Eden, August 2nd 1936. PRO, FO371/20526, W7567/62/41. Sir George Russell Clerk, British Ambassador in Paris. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, Nos. 36, 54 and 56, for details of the French proposal.

⁶ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.52. Corbin to Delbos, July 31st 1936. Charles Corbin, French Ambassador in London. For the text of the British reply, see, *ibid.*, No.71. Cambon to Delbos, August 4th 1936. Roger Cambon, French Chargé d' Affaires at the London Embassy.

clear of involvement in Spain did not once vary throughout the conflict.⁷ Occasional French temptations to change to a policy of open support for the Republic were invariably suppressed in order to prevent isolation from Great Britain, though, in Blum's words, "We supplied arms without saying so. We practised "relaxed non-intervention", which is another way of saying we organised smuggling almost officially."⁸ Unlike the French behaviour at the Montreux Conference, when the risk of offending Great Britain was taken, in the interests of strengthening the Franco-Soviet Pact, a wide divergence of views between Britain and France was now no longer acceptable to the French Government.

If only because of its geographical position, the Soviet Union was not immediately concerned with the events in Spain. However, if Spain were to come under German or Italian influence or even control, it would seriously damage France's strategic position, and France was the principal hope for the USSR's policy of collective security.⁹ Throughout the war editorials in the Soviet press continually emphasised the strategic importance of Spain to Great Britain and France.¹⁰ Thus the Soviet Government could to some extent assess the

⁷ D. Carlton, "Eden, Blum and the origins of Non-Intervention", Journal of Contemporary History, 1971, Vol.6, No.3, pp. 40-55. Carlton disposes of the view that Blum acted under pressure from the British Government.

⁸ L. Blum, "Le Populaire", October 15th 1945, quoted in M.D. Gallagher, "Leon Blum and the Spanish Civil War", Journal of Contemporary History, 1971, Vol.6, No.3, p.64. Gallagher gives a detailed account of Franco-British contacts prior to the adoption of the policy of Non-Intervention, *ibid.*, pp.56-64.

⁹ See, D.T. Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War" (California, 1955), p.71.

¹⁰ See, Krivitsky "I was Stalin's Agent", pp.98-99.

attitudes of these two countries to the idea of collective security, by studying their response to the open German and Italian attempts to secure a Nationalist victory, an event which seemed likely to radically alter the strategic situation in Europe. However, Moscow seems to have been aware of the general lack of importance France now gave to the Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Pact, which made the creation of a common anti-Fascist front less than probable.¹¹

Blum's non-intervention proposal¹² placed the USSR in a delicate position,¹³ As leader, in Soviet terms, of the forces of 'progressive mankind', to accept the Western capitalist scheme of non-intervention in Spain, when the Popular Front Government faced a German-Italian backed military rebellion, would damage the prestige of the USSR in the eyes of the European left.

Equally, a Soviet refusal to accept the non-intervention proposal would antagonise the moderate parties in the Western democracies on whom Russia was basing her hopes of an anti-Fascist Front, and would lend credence to the Fascist propaganda about Soviet intervention in Spain. This in turn would increase fears of a Communist revolutionary presence in Western Europe and leave Russia isolated, with her policy of

¹¹ See, *ibid.* p.94. Krivitsky believed that Stalin saw the Franco-Soviet Pact as a "feeble reed to lean on." In a conversation with Bülow, the French Ambassador in Berlin, André François-Poncet, hinted that the French link with Russia was not indispensable to France. DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.66, p.67. Memorandum by Acting State Secretary, September 1st 1936. See also, Clerk to Eden, August 11th 1936. PRO, FO371/20526, W8023/62/41. Clerk reported that French military circles objected to the relationship with the USSR.

¹² For the text of the proposal, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.75. Circular from Delbos, August 4th 1936.

¹³ Payart noted the delicacy of the Soviet position. See, *ibid.*, No.130. Payart to Delbos, August 12th 1936.

collective security in ruins.¹⁴ It is significant that one of the earliest Soviet press comments on the situation in Spain was a strong denial of the rebel reports that a Soviet tanker had delivered fuel to the Government forces, and a statement emphasising that the Soviet Union had no desire for submarine bases in Spain. Izvestia continued:

The Spanish Government has never asked the Soviet Union for assistance and we are convinced that they will find in their own country sufficient forces to liquidate this mutiny of Fascist generals acting on orders from foreign countries.¹⁵

Perhaps in the light of the successful conclusion of the Montreux Conference, the Soviet Government hoped that the non-intervention plan might prove effective; if it did not, then at least the USSR would not be diplomatically isolated. Thus the Soviet Union decided to accept the French proposal, and replied accordingly on August 5th 1936:

The Government of the U.S.S.R. subscribes to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Spain and is ready to take part in the proposed agreement. It also desires that, in addition to the States mentioned in the French appeal, Portugal should also join the agreement, and secondly, that the assistance rendered by certain States to the rebels against the legal Government of Spain should be immediately discontinued.¹⁶

¹⁴ See, B.Bolloten, "The Grand Camouflage", (London, 1968). Bolloten states that "from the very inception of the war, the Comintern had sought to minimize the profound revolution that had taken place in Spain by defining the struggle against General Franco as one for the defence of the democratic republic", p.101. Cattell takes the view that, whatever its actions, the USSR "was not willing to give up her revolutionary aims or her striving for control over the world proletariat through the Comintern". Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p.53. Moscow's actions in Spain seem to show that the desire for control over the Spanish Republic took precedence over any revolutionary aims. See, Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", p.94.

¹⁵ Izvestia, July 26th 1936. Maisky spoke on similar lines to Beatrice Webb, on August 6th. Passfield Papers, The Diary of Beatrice Webb, Vol.50, August 6th 1936, p.101. (Hereinafter: Webb).

¹⁶ Degras, Vol.III, p.203. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.89.

Litvinov later gave the reason for Soviet acceptance of the plan as the desire not to oppose the French. "The Soviet Government", he declared at League of Nations on September 28th 1936, "has associated itself with the Declaration on Non-Intervention in Spanish affairs only because a friendly Power (i.e. France) feared an international conflict if we did not do so".¹⁷ But Moscow was under no illusions as to the real situation in Spain. Articles in the Russian press as early as July 27th, showed that the Russians were aware of the existence of German and Italian support for the rebels.¹⁸ Yet the Soviet Government accepted the non-intervention initiative. An Izvestia editorial, on August 26th, explained the actions of the USSR by stressing that non-intervention was not a Soviet concept, and that the German and Italian aid to Spain was not the responsibility of the Soviet Union. It continued:

The declaration of neutrality worked out by the French Government is apparently directed towards the cessation of this (Fascist) aid to the rebels and to the guaranteeing of the actual non-participation of other countries in Spanish affairs. For this reason, the motives which led the Soviet Government to accept this declaration are understood....Up to the present time there has been no precedent whereby the government of any country elected in accordance with its laws and recognized by all Powers is put on a level both judicially and in practice with rebels fighting it. There has never been a case wherein the fulfillment of orders of such a government and the supplying of it has been considered as intervention in internal affairs.¹⁹

¹⁷ M.M.Litvinov, "Protiv agressii", (Moscow, 1938), p.30.

¹⁸ On August 22nd, Schulenburg protested to Litvinov about the repeated Soviet accusations that Germany was intervening in Spain. Litvinov promised to "put an end to excesses of Soviet propaganda." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.51, p.52. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, August 22nd 1936. For a similar exchange see *ibid.*, No.63.

¹⁹ Izvestia, August 26th 1936.

At the same time as the Soviet reply was being communicated the Soviet press carried reports of mass demonstrations and announcements that a collection of 12,000,000 roubles had been made from the Soviet Trade Unions, which was to be sent to Spain mainly in the form of food and blankets.²⁰ Chilston pointed out that this was, to all intents and purposes, a state levy on wage earners and, therefore could be regarded as Government money.²¹ For a few weeks this was the only form of aid being sent from the USSR to Spain, but at an unknown date in August the Soviet Government, despite its official commitment to non-intervention, took the decision to send military aid to the Spanish Republic.

This dual approach to the Spanish conflict has its origins in the dilemma facing the USSR. That Stalin sent aid to the Republic in order to preserve Democracy, is as improbable as the view that he was intent on creating a Communist satellite in the West.²² The latter seems to be disproved, both by his commitment to the policy of "socialism in one country", and by the amount of material sent to the Republic which was never in sufficient quantities to ensure more than local Loyalist victories. Equally unlikely was Krivitsky's allegation, that Stalin was seeking an alliance with Hitler by gaining control over Spain, as a Soviet presence in Western Europe would have alarmed Britain and France as much as Hitler.²³ Any Soviet rapprochement with Hitler would

²⁰ See, Pravda, August 4th 1936.

²¹ See, Chilston to Eden, August 7th 1936. PRO, FO371/20527, W7903/62/41. See also, FRUS, 1936, Vol.II, p.461. The Charge in the Soviet Union (Henderson) to the Secretary of State, August 4th 1936.

²² See, Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p.59.

²³ Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", p.94.

be through secret diplomatic or economic channels, not over the battlefields of Spain.

The decision to send military aid to Spain can therefore be seen as an attempt at a holding action, to give the Republic sufficient aid to hold off the rebels while Britain and France could have time to reconsider non-intervention in the light of the threat to their strategic interests. This would also give the USSR rich rewards in the propaganda field, as being the only nation to defend the Spanish Republic from the menace of Fascism.²⁴

The policy of collective security which had replaced the German-Soviet link as the principal pillar of Soviet Foreign policy was no illusion. The joining of the League of Nations, the Franco-Soviet Pact, the Popular Front and Litvinov's speeches all indicated that the Soviet Government was genuine in its attitude, though as has been shown, not to the exclusion of other possible avenues.

True, the reaction of Britain and France to the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, the German re-occupation of the Rhineland and the Japanese aggression in China, had not been encouraging from the Soviet point of view, but the Montreux Conference had been a success, both for the Soviet Government itself and in the context of collective security: so there was the possibility that non-intervention might also prove effective. For the Soviet Union to have ignored the requests of her principal Western ally regarding non-intervention in Spain, and to have openly supplied arms to the Republic, would have inevitably led to a collapse of the Soviet Union's painstaking efforts to play a major part in international affairs

²⁴ See, Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p.73.

after the isolation of the early years of Soviet power, and the spectre of the Four-Power Pact haunted any solution of the Spanish problem made without the participation of the USSR.

Like the original non-intervention proposal, the idea of the Non-Intervention Committee was of French origin. On August 25th 1936, Delbos instructed French representatives in all the capitals of Europe (apart from Madrid), to inform the Governments to which they were accredited of the proposed formation in London, of a Committee for Non-Intervention in Spanish Affairs.²⁵

Maisky's "Spanish Notebooks" give a highly critical picture of the work of the Non-intervention Committee, a view which is understandable, both in the light of the facts and Maisky's ideological standpoint. However, the reasons he gives for the adherence of his Government to the policy of non-intervention are somewhat less than objective. He claims that two considerations were basic for the Soviet Government:

First, the interests of peace. In our day any armed conflict, even a local one, carries with it the lurking threat of escalation into world war. The struggle then beginning in Spain was all the more pregnant with such danger. It was necessary first of all to localize it and not allow the intervention of others, especially the Great Powers.

Secondly, the interests of democracy. The Soviet government understood that the broad masses of the Spanish people were for the Republic and that the rebels would soon fail, if only German and Italian intervention were prevented. It was therefore entirely logical to attempt.....to achieve this prevention by means of an agreement on non-intervention.²⁶

Maisky points out that Soviet motives for continued participation in the Committee, even when it had become an open farce, were similarly twofold:

²⁵ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.199. Circular from Delbos, August 25th 1936. See, Eden, pp.402-403.

²⁶ I.Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", (London, 1966), p.31.

First, the interests of the fight to mobilise the democratic forces of the world to defend the Spanish Republic. The presence of Soviet representatives in the Committee for 'Non-Intervention' afforded the opportunity of watching every move of the enemies of Spanish democracy, of exposing their intrigues, and of speaking to world public opinion of Fascism and the danger of war with full knowledge of what was going on.

Secondly, counteracting any individual acts intended to worsen the position of the Spanish Republic. In the Committee for 'Non-Intervention' the principle of unanimity obtained, as in the League of Nations, and this enabled the Soviet delegation by its single vote to kill in embryo many vicious machinations against Spanish democracy; not only the Fascist powers but the so-called 'democratic' powers also were greatly given to such things.

In the end the U.S.S.R. participated in the Agreement on 'Non-Intervention' and in the Committee for the same almost until they ceased to exist. And in the light of history we can say boldly that this line of conduct fully justified itself.²⁷

On September 9th 1936, the Non-Intervention Committee met for the first time, in the Locarno Room of the Foreign Office in London. The chairman, and leader of the British delegation was W.S. Morrison.²⁸ The other members of the Committee were the London-based ambassadors, or envoys of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany,²⁹ Greece, Holland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Roumania, Sweden, Turkey, the USSR and Yugoslavia. This first meeting was of a purely formal nature. Morrison expressed his regret at the absence of the Portuguese representative.³⁰ It was decided that the Committee would hold its meetings in secret.

²⁷ Ibid. p.32.

²⁸ Financial Secretary to the British Treasury. Morrison was succeeded by Lord Plymouth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, at the fourth meeting of the Committee.

²⁹ Germany was initially reluctant to take part in the proposed Committee. See DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, Nos. 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 71, 72. The French Government asked Britain to persuade the Germans to cooperate, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III. No.230. The German Government agreed to join the Committee on receiving British assurances that the Committee was to "exercise no control powers and make no majority decisions", see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III. No.74.

³⁰ The Portuguese Ambassador, Count Montiero, was not present at the early meetings of the Committee. Portugal was persuaded to take part by Eden in Geneva, on September 24th. See, H.Thomas."The Spanish Civil War".(London,1965) p.362.

On the basis of this decision Morrison asked the members of Committee to exercise as much restraint as possible towards the press, and the Committee adopted the proposal that an agreed joint communiqué should be issued at the end of each session.³¹

Only European countries, with the exception of Switzerland, took part in the Committee. Maisky, however, claimed that even if the USA was not actually represented on the Committee "its ghost was always present at the conference table, exerting the strongest of influences on the representatives of Britain, France and the other "democratic" powers."³² There is little evidence to support Maisky's allegation. The most important representatives at the London Committee were Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Ambassador, Dino Grandi his Italian counterpart, Corbin and Maisky.

While Maisky was in the Soviet Union, on leave from his London post, S.B. Kagan, the Chargé d'Affaires at the Soviet Embassy, represented the USSR at the early meetings of the Non-Intervention Committee. Kagan's first major speech, at the second meeting of the Committee accused Italy of supplying aircraft to the insurgents, and proposed an immediate investigation be undertaken by the Committee.³³ In what was to become typical of the methods of the Committee throughout its entire existence, this accusation was put to one side in favour of procedural business, in this case the setting up of a Sub-Committee. The continual directness of the Soviet Union

³¹ Proceedings of the International Committee on Non-Intervention, N.I.S.(36), first meeting, September 9th 1936. PRO, FO371/20591, W11115/11115/41. (Hereinafter: NIS. Proceedings of Chairman's Sub-Committee: NIS (c)). Corbin's despatches to the French Government also provide much useful information on the Committee's proceedings. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.242. Corbin to Delbos, September 9th 1936.

³² Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.30.

³³ NIS, second meeting, September 14th 1936.

in openly accusing the Fascist Powers of flouting the non-intervention agreement, did much to improve the standing of the USSR among the "progressive forces of mankind", a contrast with the apparent prevarication and duplicity of the Western democracies which the Soviet press and the left-wing press of Europe frequently made. Maisky himself relates how he leaked information on the proceedings of the Committee to the press, much to the irritation of Ribbentrop, Grandi and other delegates who wished to keep the activities of the Committee private.³⁴

Little of consequence took place at the early meetings of the Committee, which tended to consist of repetitions of the increasingly familiar pattern of Soviet charges followed by German, Italian or Portuguese denials and counter-charges. By the fourth meeting of the Sub-Committee, Kagan was beginning to voice Soviet disapproval of the work of the Committee, which seemed to him to be perpetually involved in wide discussions of its terms of reference. Kagan attempted to introduce a note of realism, "The Committee should occupy itself with the very grave and serious questions which are entrusted to it."³⁵

This attitude was echoed in the Soviet press. An article in Izvestia on the Spanish situation stressed the strategic importance of Spain to Britain and France, and observed that,

the agreement on non-intervention makes sense only if it is to be observed. On the suggestion of English Government, a special committee to supervise this was created and is now sitting in London. The Committee has been in session for almost one month, but nothing has yet emerged from its work.³⁶

³⁴ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", pp.34-36.

³⁵ "IS(c)", fourth meeting, September 28th 1936.

³⁶ Izvestia, September 28th 1936.

Kagan's criticism of the Committee continued, and he again expressed his fears that the Committee would "drown the whole subject in discussion of points of procedure."³⁷

On October 7th, Kagan had sent a note to Plymouth and to Vienot the French representative at the League of Nations. The note stated that the USSR would not be bound by the non-intervention agreement unless violations ceased. Plymouth was irritated to find that the note had been received in Geneva before it had been handed to him. He reminded Kagan that he had expressly understood that the Committee's proceedings should not be communicated to the press without the agreement of all its members.³⁸

In Moscow, Schulenburg attributed this Soviet action to the desire to make propaganda out of the Committee's difficulties:

Concerning the effect which can be expected from the Soviet action in London on October 7th, the diplomatic corps here feels that for the time being the Soviet Union is less intent on destroying the non-intervention agreement than on forcing France and England to see that the agreement is observed by other countries. On the other hand, the diplomatic corps is of the opinion that the Soviet Union would not be sorry if the embargo were to break down. The French suggest that the Soviet Government is merely interested in obtaining a certain satisfaction in London which would permit it to save face....

It is obvious that it is a maneuver calculated for its propaganda effect; the lack of any thorough substantiation of the accusation contained in the Soviet declaration of October 7th and the absence of a concrete proposal for further procedure, along with the most extreme threats to withdraw, reveal clearly that the Russians were in a hurry to create a definite agitation.³⁹

³⁷ NIS, fifth meeting, October 9th 1936.

³⁸ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.322. Corbin to Delbos, October 8th 1936.

³⁹ DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.97, p.109. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, October 12th 1936. For rumours of an impending Soviet withdrawal from the Committee, see, FRUS, 1936, Vol.II, pp. 535-536, 539-542 and 545-546.

At the sixth meeting of the Committee, Kagan made a lengthy statement which was intended to clarify the Soviet position with regard to the Non-Intervention Agreement, and which was, in various forms, repeated by Maisky several times during the existence of the Committee. He accused Portugal of infringements of the Agreement, and called for the sending of an impartial commission to the Spanish-Portuguese border. This led to the withdrawal of the Portuguese representative. Kagan complained of this type of approach to the function of the Committee:

The actual situation, faced straightforwardly, is that the Agreement is not being fulfilled and that violations, on the part of some of the participants, are taking place....This state of affairs compels the Government of the U.S.S.R. to express the fear that such a situation created by repeated violations of the Agreement renders the Non-Intervention Agreement virtually non-existent. The Soviet Government....can in no case agree to turn the Non-Intervention Agreement into a screen shielding the military aid given to the rebels by some of the participants in the Agreement, against the legitimate Spanish Government....It is because of this state of affairs that the Soviet Government is compelled to declare that if violations of the Agreement for Non-Intervention are not immediately stopped, the Soviet Government will consider itself free from the obligations arising out of the Agreement.⁴⁰

This clear statement of the Soviet position was not obscured by the lively mutual exchange of accusations by Italy and the USSR which followed, and Kagan once again repeated his clarification of the Soviet attitude before the meeting had closed.⁴¹

⁴⁰ NIS, sixth meeting, October 9th 1936.

⁴¹ After this stormy meeting, Corbin reported that such bitter exchanges threw "a certain discredit on the Committee, by revealing its impotence in all cases of infringement, real or otherwise." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.331. Corbin to Delbos, October 10th 1936.

Once Maisky had taken his place on the London Committee, he reiterated the Soviet proviso concerning the continued participation of the USSR in the Agreement. On October 23rd he complained that his proposals to investigate supposed Portuguese infringements of the Agreement had been ignored,⁴² "Thus the Agreement has turned out to be an empty, torn scrap of paper. It has ceased in practice to exist."⁴³ Five days later Maisky made another in this series of similar statements, the one which he regards as defining the exact position of the Soviet Union. He held the Portuguese reply to his earlier accusations up to "cruel ridicule",⁴⁴ attacked Italy for her breaches of the Agreement and explained:

The Soviet Government adheres to the declaration regarding non-intervention presuming equal obligation for all the participants of the Agreement. The violation of the Agreement relieves also the other participants of their obligations.⁴⁵

Maisky continued by saying that although the main motive behind Soviet foreign policy was the desire for peace, Soviet sympathy was naturally on the side of the Spanish Republic the survival of which represented the interests of peace:

This is the main reason why the Soviet Government and the peoples of the Soviet Union have so taken to heart the present trouble in Spain. The constant policy of international peace pursued by the Soviet Union inspires the present attitude of the Soviet Union towards Spanish affairs.⁴⁶

⁴² On October 12th, Maisky had sent Plymouth a note demanding the immediate recall of the Committee, in view of the Portuguese violations of the Agreement. He proposed that naval supervision of Portuguese ports should be undertaken by the British or French fleets, or both. Plymouth replied that as the Portuguese infringements had not been proved, there was no reason to recall the Committee. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.347. Corbin to Delbos, October 14th 1936.

⁴³ NIS, seventh meeting, October 23rd 1936. See also, DDF, 2e Serie Vol.III, No.402.

⁴⁴ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.60.

⁴⁵ NIS, eighth meeting, October 28th 1936. See also, Pravda and Izvestia, October 24th 1936.

⁴⁶ NIS, eighth meeting, October 28th 1936.

One result of the Soviet stand taken at the London Committee, was the increasing isolation of the Russians. Corbin reported on October 29th, that Maisky's attacks on Portugal had "annoyed the British and the veiled threat that the Government in Moscow will claim its liberty of action, has played the German and Italian game."⁴⁷ Litvinov told Payart in Moscow, on October, 31st, "We do not recognize that we are in reality, morally bound by the agreement." He added that although the Italians were acting in a manner likely to cause the dissolution of the Committee "we do not want to take the responsibility for it." Payart was particularly concerned at Maisky's activities in London, describing them as "imprudent" and "discourteous", for the isolation of the Soviet Union would, he felt, deprive France of a diplomatic counterweight to Germany.⁴⁸

The increasingly frequent avowals of Soviet freedom to act, should the other participants not observe the Non-Intervention Agreement, did not, as might have been thought, foreshadow a change in Soviet policy. The USSR neither withdrew from the Committee, for fear of being blamed for the failure of Non-Intervention,⁴⁹ nor was it then decided to send military aid to the Spanish Republic, for this decision had already been taken. The Soviet Government had thus decided to supply arms to Spain in direct contravention of the Non-Intervention Agreement it had so recently signed, and while

⁴⁷ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.419. Corbin to Delbos, October 29th 1936. See also, *ibid.*, No.442. Corbin to Delbos, November 5th 1936. Corbin again mentions that Maisky was isolated, despite the skill with which he put the Soviet case.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, No.429. Payart to Delbos, October 31st 1936.

⁴⁹ Thomas believes that the Soviet decision to remain a member of the Committee was the result of Litvinov's return from Geneva. "He no doubt pointed out that an abandonment of the Committee would mean a breach with France and Britain, and, therefore a blow to the policy of collective security." Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.397.

its representatives on the Committee in London fiercely denounced Germany and Italy for acting in an analogous manner.

It is not yet possible to discover the exact date upon which the Soviet Government decided to send arms to Spain, but most available information supports Krivitsky's assertion that the decision was made in late August or early September.⁵⁰ Russian advisers, military technicians and light arms began to arrive in the second half of September, followed by the first Soviet bombers, tanks and artillery in October, and the first fighters on November 2nd.⁵¹ The German Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow, Tippelskirch, suggested that more than food was in the Soviet vessel 'Neva' which reached Spain on September 25th.⁵² Louis Fischer writes that he saw Soviet tanks near Madrid on October 24th, and that he met a Soviet officer on the same day.⁵³ The most comprehensive list of Soviet aid to Spain is that compiled by the German Military Attaché at Ankara, whose reports shows that twenty Soviet ships had arrived in Spain by the end of October 1936.⁵⁴

In the face of this evidence, Maisky's claim that the

⁵⁰ Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", p.98.

⁵¹ Bolloten, "The Grand Camouflage", p.99. Bolloten's information comes from conversations with Republican military leaders. The dates given, are generally confirmed by reports from foreign diplomats in Spain and the USSR. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, Nos. 81,89,100,107,117,118 and 120. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III. Nos. 374,384,405 and 504. FRUS, 1936, Vol.II, pp.544,555,564. See also, Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", pp.69-83. Thomas feels that the decision to send Soviet aid to Spain was taken somewhat later, at the beginning of October. See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", pp.337, 376-377.

⁵² DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.88, p.100. Tippelskirch to the Foreign Ministry, September 28th 1936.

⁵³ L.Fischer, "Russia's Road from Peace to War", (New York,1969), p.277.

⁵⁴ See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", Appendix 3, pp.800-803. See also DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.115. Keller to the Foreign Ministry, November 6th 1936. The French Chargé in Ankara, Lescuyer, also noted a marked increase in traffic through the Straits. From this information the French Ambassador to Madrid, Herbette, deduced that Moscow had made the decision to send aid to Spain in the last part of August. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.III, No.374. Herbette to Delbos, October 19th 1936.

decision to intervene in Spain was taken in October, seems to be a deliberate distortion.⁵⁵ Maisky also tends to minimize the amount of aid actually sent by the Soviet Union to Spain. He states that, "From October 1936 to September 1937 only 23 shipments of arms went by sea from the USSR to the Spanish Republic."⁵⁶ Presumably this gross underestimate was made in order to make the transgressions of Italy and Germany appear more grave. Thus the Soviet press inveighed against turning Non-Intervention into a farce, apparently oblivious of the paradoxical situation in which the Soviet Union had been since September 1936.⁵⁷ Maisky explains this contradiction thus:

When on 25th August our government signed the Agreement on Non-Intervention it quite sincerely proposed to observe this strictly, but on condition, of course, that obligations under it were equally strictly observed by the other powers (Germany and Italy first of all)....September was seen by us as the time of trial, and in the course of that month neither arms nor ammunition were sent from the U.S.S.R. to SpainBut when September passed us by and Germany and Italy were continuing, with Britain and France standing passively by, to supply Franco with arms and 'advisers' in ever-increasing quantities, the U.S.S.R. was compelled to change its original intentions.⁵⁸

It is possible, if unlikely, that Maisky was unaware of the date of the Politburo decision, for secrecy and caution marked every phase of the sending of Soviet aid to the Republic. Stalin, according to Krivitsky, doubly cautioned his commissars that Soviet aid to Spain must be unofficial and handled covertly, in order to eliminate any possibility of involving his

⁵⁵ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.74.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.116. In this period, the German Attaché noted ninety-seven shipments through the Dardanelles alone. This ignores consignments arriving by other routes, including those across the Franco-Spanish frontier.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the editorial in Izvestia, October 11th 1936.

⁵⁸ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.74. Kagan had informed the Non-Intervention Committee that the Soviet prohibition of deliveries to Spain dated from August 28th. NIS, second meeting, September 14th 1936.

government in war. His last phrase passed down by those at that Politburo meeting as a command to all high officers of the service was: Podalshe ot artillereiskovo ognia! - "Stay out of range of the artillery fire!"⁵⁹

While the Non-Intervention Committee engaged in futile debate, the war in Spain continued with the advantage going predominantly to the Nationalists. However, on November 12th 1936 Lord Plymouth's plan for the posting of observers at Spanish frontiers and ports was finally approved by the Committee.

Maisky claims the credit for initiating the creation of this control scheme by referring to his note of October 12th, which protested at the infringement of the Agreement by the Fascist Powers, and demanded the immediate establishment of a watch on the Portuguese ports.⁶⁰ Eden claims that he and Corbin had discussed a proposal for the supervision of the work of the Committee on the spot, and that five days later on October 28th Maisky had,

developed the suggestion for supervision which Corbin and I had discussed. He proposed that the Committee should examine the control of Portuguese ports and Spanish ports and frontiers. Grandi and Corbin both agreed to consider this.⁶¹

The control scheme which the Committee approved on November 12th had four main points. Two groups of neutral persons were to be established, one to be positioned at the main points of entry into Spain within the territory under the control of Spanish Government, while the other group was to be

⁵⁹ Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", pp.99-100. Thomas feels that it is probable that even high-ranking Soviet officials, including Maisky and Litvinov, were not informed of Stalin's decision until it became necessary. Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.381.

⁶⁰ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.94.

⁶¹ Eden, p.411. Eden continued, "Thus ended non-intervention's first phase. After little more than a month, the nations had to accept that non-intervention would not work."

at similar points on the territory controlled by the rebels. Secondly, the personnel involved were to be approved by a plenary meeting of the Non-Intervention Committee, in the interests of impartiality. Thirdly, members of the two groups were to have the right to ascertain that nothing prohibited by the Non-Intervention Agreement was imported into Spain. Finally, the groups of observers were to report all infringements to the Committee, either on their own initiative or when asked by the Committee. Maisky approved the plan, which had taken the Committee so long to produce, and drew attention to the cost⁶² of implementing the scheme:

I think all of us would be agreed that the institution of such effective control is the task which animates our Committee and the organisation of such an effective control is in my opinion, the only justification for the existence of the Committee. Therefore, I think that when members of the Committee consider the scheme and consult their respective Governments they should also keep in mind that if we really desire to have effective control, we must be prepared to take the consequences, the financial consequences involved.⁶³

Some indication of the Soviet position in the autumn of 1936, was given by Maisky on November 15th, during one of his frequent visits to the Webbs. Beatrice wrote:

He was in a state of self-complacent excitement over his activities in the non-intervention committee. "The new diplomacy", he said, "did not shrink from exchanging unpleasant truths: Grandi denounced the USSR" and he had "replied in kind" and he added "won in the duel of words".....

Maisky seemed to have little fear of getting involved in a war through helping the Spanish government... though he admitted there might be a risk - but implied that the Kremlin was willing to run the risk in order to prevent the rise of a fascist Spain.⁶⁴

⁶² Approximately £1,000,000.

⁶³ NIS, eleventh meeting, November 12th 1936.

⁶⁴ Webb, Vol.50, November 15th 1936, pp.152-153. She also noted gossip that Vansittart and Eden had spoken contemptuously about Maisky as that "horrid little Russian", and that they "regarded him as an unpleasant intruder among the representatives of civilised European countries!"

While the Committee was wrestling with the problem of the supervision scheme, events in Spain and Europe were taking place at a rate which made the convoluted negotiations in London seem like the calm in the eye of the hurricane. Franco's advance on Madrid had failed, and it was beginning to seem probable that the war would last longer than had been expected. Moves were made over the heads of the London Committee to try to secure an agreement of Germany, Italy, Portugal, the USA and the USSR, to cease any actions direct or indirect which involved intervention in Spain. As Eden recalls, this Anglo-French appeal of December 4th came to nothing, "the replies were slow in arriving and lukewarm when they did."⁶⁵

On the same day Lord Plymouth brought the question of foreign personnel fighting in Spain, before the Committee, and emphasised that he felt it should be given priority over the other business of the Committee.⁶⁶ Maisky raised this problem once more on December 9th, having already mentioned the need to prohibit foreign nationals from fighting in Spain in a letter to Plymouth on December 4th.⁶⁷ He now proposed that the Non-Intervention Agreement be extended to cover the sending of volunteers to Spain and that the existing agents of the Committee be given the additional task of reporting on the arrival of such volunteers in Spain. To this practical

⁶⁵ Eden, p.416. For details of the French part in the proposal, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, Nos.39,69 and 94. Robert Coulondre, the French Ambassador in Moscow, reported that the proposal had been viewed with some approval. Ibid.,No.153, Coulondre to Delbos, December 15th 1936. See also, D.T.Cattell, "Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War", (California,1957), p.56. For the German reply, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.152, p.165. Memorandum to the British and French Embassies, December 12th 1936.

⁶⁶ NIS (c), fourteenth meeting, December 4th 1936.

⁶⁷ See, Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.97.

suggestion Maisky appended a typical, if justified criticism of the Committee's achievements to date:

the results of the Committee's work during these three months can in no case be considered satisfactoryAs to the Committee itself, however it must be confessed that it has so far but one achievement to show: a positively amazing talent for performing that drill which is called 'marking time'... the balance sheet of the Committee's activities during the three months of its existence may be summed up in Hamlet's famous utterance: "Words, words, words!"⁶⁸

Eden was slowly coming to a similar conclusion, reporting meetings he had with Ribbentrop and Maisky, in December, with a kind of genteel despair:

Ribbentrop alleged that Soviet Russia had already sent 50,000 men to Spain, while three days later Maisky told me that Germany was planning to send 60,000. When I told the Soviet Ambassador of the reports that Russia had 50,000 men in Spain, he immediately denied that the number of his countrymen approached this figure. In any event, he added, they had not sent regiments of soldiers, but only a small number of technical experts. I interjected 'and aviators'. The Ambassador did not specifically deny this, but affirmed that his Government were prepared to join in any international action to stop the flow of volunteers.⁶⁹

He was beginning to realise that, "Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin would break any engagement, if it suited their purposes in Spain."⁷⁰

Yet in spite of the disillusion of those genuinely committed to Non-Intervention, and no doubt to the satisfaction

⁶⁸ NIS, thirteenth meeting, December 9th 1936.

⁶⁹ Eden, p.417. It is of interest that Eden, at this time, had more specific evidence of Soviet than of German or Italian intervention, p.411. Cattell states that, "It is doubtful whether the entire Russian military forces in Spain ever reached more than four to five thousand." Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p.82. Most estimates are much lower, see, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War" Appendix 3, p.797.

⁷⁰ Eden, p.418. Initial British policy towards Spain was decided by the Foreign Office, as the Cabinet did not meet from the end of July until the beginning of September. See, *ibid.*, p.404.

of those not so committed, the Non-Intervention Committee continued to meet, as it seemed to be the only hope, however forlorn, of containing the war. This was all the more so after the failure of the League Council to take steps following the plea of the Spanish Foreign Minister, Alvarez del Vayo, for action to be taken over the situation in his country.⁷¹ The French and British representatives denied his charge that the Non-Intervention Agreement had proved ineffective and persuaded the Council to pass a resolution condemning intervention. The resolution also urged League members on the Non-Intervention Committee to strive to secure non-intervention, and commended the Anglo-French mediation proposal. The proposal was soon allowed to die.

The close of 1936 can have brought the Soviet Government no great satisfaction, other than in the sphere of international propaganda where Soviet gains had been considerable. Maisky's championing of the Loyalist cause at the Non-Intervention Committee in London and the Soviet military aid to the Republic, revealed the USSR as the only nation which had come to the aid of the Spanish Republic.⁷²

Although the Soviet Union made no formal announcement regarding the assistance it was giving to the Republic, the international press, and the often exaggerated accusations of Italy and Germany, ensured that the world was made aware of the existence in Spain of Soviet tanks, aircraft and other equipment. Inside the Soviet Union there was none of the glorification of its intervention in Spain which marked Mussolini's participation in the same conflict. In fact

⁷¹ Litvinov had asked del Vayo not to mention Spain at the League Council. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol. IV, No. 35. Coulondre to Delbos, November 26th 1936.

⁷² See, Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p. 73.

precautions were taken to keep Soviet involvement as secret as possible. Soviet military periodicals devoted much attention to the war in Spain,⁷³ but the everyday press gave few clues as to the extent or even the existence of Soviet arms and advisers in Spain.⁷⁴ On January 1st 1937, seventeen Soviet pilots were made "Heroes of the Soviet Union" as a reward for "difficult Government tasks", in other words, for service in Spain.⁷⁵

The favourable publicity which the Soviet Union received from certain quarters, can have been little consolation for the Soviet Government for whom it was but the by-product of a worsening international situation. Indeed the policy of collective security seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Its lynch-pin, the Franco-Soviet Pact had lost much of its potential value, Blum's assurances notwithstanding,⁷⁶ because of France's equivocal reaction to the Fascist threat on her

⁷³ See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.380. Fischer, "Men and Politics", p.284.

⁷⁴ Schulenburg noted this complete absence from the Soviet press of any mention of Soviet military aid to Spain. DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.159, p.174. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, December 21st 1936. Clues did, however, appear. Izvestia, February 17th 1937, carried a photograph of Republican troops in the defence of Madrid, using a Maxim MMG, Model 1910, of Russian pattern, but no mention was made of the origin of the machine-gun. Similarly Izvestia, October 10th 1938, showed "a fighter of the Republican Air Force". This was a Soviet-supplied Polikarpov I-16. Once again the source of such aircraft was not mentioned. See, W.Green, "Polikarpov's Little Hawk", Flying Review International, Vol.25, No.7, November 1969, pp.58-65. "The month of November 1936 had barely dawned when a rather obese little monoplane made its operational debut in the newly war torn skies of Spain....There was no mystery attached to its origin. Indeed, it had been displayed publicly in Milan during the previous year, and the Spanish Republicans on whose behalf it was flying made propaganda capital out of its nationality immediately it appeared over the front."

⁷⁵ See, Fischer, "Men and Politics", p.387.

⁷⁶ See, Izvestia, December 17th 1936.

Western border and her increasing identification of interests with Great Britain. The British Government too, appeared content to see its imperial sea routes threatened by the strong possibility that Spain would either join the Fascist powers or give them naval bases in Spanish territory.⁷⁷ The creation of the Anti-Comintern Pact, on November 25th 1936, despite its largely ornamental nature, was not reassuring in its intent, the Soviet Government seeing it as both a "plot against peace"⁷⁸ and as an attempt to surround the USSR.⁷⁹ Even more disturbing was the possibility that a new and more aggressive version of the Locarno agreements, or a new Four-Power Pact might be concluded. A correspondent suggested in Izvestia that in any new Five-Power conference Germany would want no mention of border guarantees in the East,⁸⁰ a threat that had been appreciated by the USSR as early as September 21st 1936.⁸¹ As if to confirm Soviet fears that the Western democracies were once again on the road to rapprochement with the Fascist powers, came the news of the Anglo-Italian conversations which were to lead to the Agreement of January 2nd, 1937.⁸² This was intended to maintain the 'status quo' in the Mediterranean. However, two

⁷⁷ Despite Soviet warnings. See, Izvestia, December 20th 1936, for an article on the strategic significance of Ceuta, Cadiz and the Balearics as naval bases.

⁷⁸ Izvestia, November 21st 1936.

⁷⁹ See, Izvestia, November 29th 1936.

⁸⁰ See, Izvestia, November 2nd 1936.

⁸¹ See, Izvestia, September 21st 1936.

⁸² Ciano had specifically stated that he did not want French participation in these talks, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol. IV, Nos. 177, 188. See also, Izvestia, December 27th 1936.

days later Mussolini landed further Italian troops in Spain; clearly "a violation of the spirit of the Agreement."⁸³ But perhaps most alarming of all for the Soviet Government, were the attacks on Russian shipping in the Mediterranean.⁸⁴ These attacks were the first stages of the naval piracy which eventually led to the calling of the Nyon Conference.

At the London Committee the question of prohibiting the entry of foreign volunteers into Spain, dragged on into 1937. The Soviet Union had already agreed⁸⁵ to the Anglo-French proposal concerning the ban on volunteers, and by the 7th of January 1937 Germany, Italy and Portugal had sent their replies. The German reply promised cooperation provided that the scheme was effectively controlled. Eden's plan to offer the services of the British Navy as a supervisory force was not allowed to proceed and on January 10th these consequently "truncated proposals" were adopted for the prevention of the passage of foreign volunteers to Spain. On February 20th the Non-Intervention Committee took the decision which banned foreign nationals from participating in the Spanish conflict, "at least on paper"⁸⁶ as Eden realistically adds. Maisky had previously welcomed the decision of the Sub-Committee on foreign volunteers, and the allied plan for a sea and land

⁸³ Eden, p.433. François-Poncet reported from Berlin that one of the first visible consequences of this agreement was "to permit Germany and Italy to think that they were authorised to exacerbate the conflict". DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, No.239. François-Poncet to Delbos, January 5th 1937.

⁸⁴ See, Izvestia, November 17th; December 7th, 14th and 21st, 1936.

⁸⁵ Moscow agreed on December 27th. See DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, No.215. Coulondre to Delbos, December 27th 1936. See also, *ibid.*, Nos.220, 225.

⁸⁶ Eden, p.438.

control scheme, though true to form, he attacked the tardiness of the Committee in so doing:

More than two months have gone by since the idea of including 'volunteers' was incorporated in our discussions, and all kinds of stumbling blocks inside and outside the Committee have so far prevented any progress from being made in banning foreign nationals from participating in the Spanish conflict or in establishing a scheme of control - an indispensable part of the Committee's work.⁸⁷

The Sub-Committee's plan was for observers to be on the non-Spanish side of the Spanish frontiers and on all merchant vessels belonging to signatories of the Non-Intervention Agreement. Warships of the navies of Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany were to patrol Spanish waters. However, the Soviet Union made it clear that it wished to take part in the naval control scheme. "The Soviet Government....demanded on principle its full equality of rights in this respect."⁸⁸ This Soviet demand was met by offering the USSR a patrol area off the north coast of Spain. Germany and Italy rejected Maisky's suggestion of an area off the east coast, (their own allocated area) since they objected to a Soviet naval presence

⁸⁷ NIS, fifteenth meeting, February 16th 1937. Corbin also expressed his concern at the delay in reaching an agreement. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, Nos. 449, 453. Corbin to Delbos, February 16th 1937.

⁸⁸ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.105. On January 29th, Maisky had spoken to Corbin on the subject of Soviet participation in the naval patrol scheme. He said that British objections concerning the distance of Soviet vessels from their bases could be solved by using British facilities at Malta or Gibraltar. In any case Germany would have similar problems, and, he added "if one objects that Russia is not a Mediterranean Power, it is impossible to let Germany have a control sector in the Mediterranean, as she is not either." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, No.369. Corbin to Delbos, January 29th 1937.

in the Mediterranean.⁸⁹ Plymouth told Maisky that the sight of the red flag in the Mediterranean would madden the rebels, and that the spring manoeuvres of the Home Fleet would further complicate matters.⁹⁰

However, the firmness displayed by the Soviet Government obliged all its enemies, open and concealed, to retreat. In the last resort the Committee took a decision that participation in naval patrol work was open to all powers who had signed the Agreement on Non-Intervention.⁹¹

At the meeting of February 22nd, Maisky at first refused to accept the patrol zone offered to the USSR,⁹² and insisted on a sector in the Mediterranean. When asked if his Government wanted satisfaction in principle only, in order to back down later, Maisky said that he must consult his Government again.⁹³ Maisky relates with some satisfaction, that after scoring this victory in principle, he announced that the USSR would not exercise its right to participate in the patrol scheme. He informed the Sub-Committee that,

in view of the fact that it has now been agreed in principle that any Government which is a party to the Non-Intervention Agreement has the right, should

⁸⁹ For details of German objections, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.224.

⁹⁰ See DDF, 2e Série, Vol.IV, No.388. Corbin to Delbos, February 3rd 1937. Eden asked Corbin to intercede with the Russians to drop their demand.

⁹¹ See, Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.105.

⁹² Russia had been offered a patrol sector in the Finisterre-Cape Busto area.

⁹³ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.V, No.12. Corbin to Delbos, February 23rd 1937. Corbin reported on February 20th, "The Soviet Naval attaché has made no secret of the embarrassment that Moscow could be caused by the role it is demanding for reasons of prestige, it is for this reason that he has constantly insisted on obtaining a sector in the Mediterranean, rather than in the Atlantic." The attaché was no doubt aware of the shortcomings of most Soviet naval vessels. Ibid. No.7, Corbin to Delbos, February 20th 1937.

they so desire, to participate in the naval supervision scheme, the U.S.S.R. Government does not claim at present to make actual use of this right, as it is not interested either politically or otherwise in the presence of its naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea or in the Atlantic Ocean, at a great distance from their own naval bases.⁹⁴

Maisky added that Britain and France could patrol the sector which had been allotted to the Soviet navy. This Soviet insistence on a point of principle, followed by a relative lack of concern for practice once the point had been conceded, was a typical Russian negotiating tactic with precedents dating back to the early 1920's. It does, however, seem improbable that Stalin ever intended to have units of the Red fleet off the Spanish coast, let alone in the Mediterranean. The risk of a serious clash with German, Italian or Nationalist ships was no doubt considered to be too great, as Maisky explains; "As things stood we feared possible provocative incidents, which would have made the international atmosphere even more heated."⁹⁵ The Soviet Navy in 1937, was in any case, in no condition to operate efficiently on a foreign assignment,⁹⁶

⁹⁴ NIS (c), thirty-eighth meeting, February 26th 1937. See also, Izvestia, February 28th 1937. Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.105. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.V, No.32. Ernst Woermann, Ribbentrop's deputy on the Committee and Counsellor at the German Embassy with the rank of Minister, explained the reversal of the Soviet attitude "by the fact that the Soviet Union feared that she was not up to the tasks in the Biscay zone and saw herself faced by a solid front opposed to allocating her another zone." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.224. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, February 27th 1937. Litvinov admitted to Coulondre that the Soviet stand had been taken on principle, though had participation been obligatory, the USSR would have taken part in the patrol scheme. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.V, No.60. Coulondre to Delbos, March 4th 1937.

⁹⁵ Maisky "Spanish Notebooks", p.106.

⁹⁶ See, Meister "The Soviet Navy", pp.8-12. The performance of the Red Navy in the Second World War was very mediocre.

especially in view of the gathering momentum of the purges in the Soviet Armed Forces.⁹⁷

By the end of April, 1937, the control scheme had been established and observers were in position on the Spanish frontiers and aboard the patrol ships. Maisky had greeted the Committee's acceptance of the scheme in his characteristic fashion:

in welcoming this new step we are about to take, I feel it my duty to say that the Soviet Government now, as previously, can only feel itself bound by the decisions of this Committee provided that such decisions are fully honoured by all the States Members of the Committee. In any other circumstances it will consider itself morally free to reserve freedom of action in this matter.⁹⁸

Maisky had also explained that while his country was in favour of a democratic victory in Spain, this did not imply Soviet interference in Spanish affairs, nor the creation of a Communist Republic.⁹⁹ As Maisky spoke these words, his own Government, like those of Germany and Italy, was continuing to break the Non-Intervention Agreement.

The Republican rout of the Italians at Guadalajara,¹⁰⁰ led to something of a clarification of the Italian position. At a meeting of the Sub-Committee on March 23rd, Maisky baited Grandi to such an extent that he made an outburst in which he stated that he hoped not one single Italian volunteer would

⁹⁷ For details of the purge of the Red Navy, see, Conquest "The Great Terror", pp.317-319.

⁹⁸ NIS, seventeenth meeting, March 8th 1937.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ For a description of the battle, see, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", pp.493-501.

leave Spain until France had been victorious.¹⁰¹ On March 26th 1937, Izvestia referred to the "complete collapse of the policy of non-intervention", and asked whether the Western Powers would now openly sanction Fascist intervention in Spain, for, "This question can be avoided no longer."¹⁰² Izvestia evidently underestimated the Committee's powers of survival.

On March 24th, the day after Grandi's outburst, Maisky continued the usual routine of the Committee, by accusing Italy of "ever-increasing military intervention", and despite Plymouth's attempts to call him to order, demanded urgent investigation by the Committee's agents.¹⁰³ Even with two of its members policing the supervision of their own illegal arms shipments to the Nationalists, the Committee managed to remain in existence. "The mockery was complete."¹⁰⁴

While the League Council was engaged in passing an innocuous resolution condemning the bombing of open towns, and urging the withdrawal of foreign volunteers, the German battleship 'Deutschland' was attacked by Republican aircraft. Thirty-one German sailors were killed. Two days later on May 31st, German warships shelled the town of Almeira as a reprisal. German and Italian representatives withdrew from the Non-Intervention Committee, announcing that they would also cease

¹⁰¹ NIS (c), fortieth meeting, March 23rd 1937. See also, Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.125. Cattell, "Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War", p.73. Corbin noted the "profound impression caused by the Italian declaration" and "drew the attention of the Committee to the gravity of the words uttered by Grandi....If they reflected the opinion of his Government, they risked having the most serious consequences for the future of the Committee itself and for the peace of Europe." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.V, No.157. Corbin to Delbos, March 24th 1937. Hassell reported from Rome that Grandi had exceeded his instructions. DGFP, Series D, Vol.III. Hassell to the Foreign Ministry, March 27th 1937.

¹⁰² Izvestia, March 26th 1937.

¹⁰³ NIS, nineteenth meeting, March 24th 1937.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.508.

to take part in the naval patrol scheme.¹⁰⁵

No sooner had Eden and Delbos persuaded Germany and Italy to reverse their decisions,¹⁰⁶ than on June 18th, came the news of the alleged attack on the German cruiser 'Leipzig'.¹⁰⁷ Chamberlain and Blum rejected the German demand for a four Power naval demonstration, and this led to the final withdrawal of Italy and Germany from the naval patrol scheme,¹⁰⁸ although they remained members of the Committee.¹⁰⁹ Britain and France continued the patrol alone.¹¹⁰

Ribbentrop's subsequent suggestion, made on July 2nd, that the naval patrol be replaced by a scheme granting belligerent

¹⁰⁵ NIS (c), fifty-third meeting, May 31st 1937. For the text of the German note, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.268, p.297. Neurath to the Embassy in Great Britain, May 30th 1937. Germany did not want the Italians to withdraw from the Committee, see, *ibid.*, No.269.

¹⁰⁶ Maisky sent a letter to Plymouth on June 8th, protesting at the holding of these four Power talks and the exclusion of the USSR. *Izvestia*, June 10th, claimed the talks were the prelude to a revival of the Four Power Pact. For the text of Maisky's note see DGFP. Series D, Vol.III. See also DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.39. Corbin to Delbos, June 10th 1937. Corbin had urged Maisky to be more moderate, lest his actions lead to the collapse of the Committee.

¹⁰⁷ Hugh Dalton M.P., of the National Executive of the Labour Party, saw both Vansittart and Maisky on June 24th. He noted in his diary that it was, "Curious how these two very dissimilar witnesses corroborate each other's evidence on many points....Vansittart himself was extremely doubtful whether any torpedo had been fired at the Leipzig. So was our own Admiralty....There was still danger that Germany and Italy would declare a blockade of the Spanish Government coast. This might produce very grave incidents immediately, e.g., they might begin to stop, or even sink, British or French ships." Maisky urged Dalton to make an "outcry in advance" in the House of Commons debate on the 25th. He felt that the most likely German action would be the shelling of Valencia or Barcelona, or a blockade of the Republic. *The Dalton Diaries*, No.18, June 24th 1937. (Hereinafter: Dalton).

¹⁰⁸ For the text of the German withdrawal note, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.354.

¹⁰⁹ NIS (c), fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth meetings, June 23rd 1937.

¹¹⁰ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, Nos.117, 118.

rights to both parties in Spain, thus enabling them to blockade each other, was strongly opposed by Maisky, though the other members of the Committee were vague in their replies. Maisky rejected the proposals as,

utterly contrary to international law, and one-sided in their effect on the situation in Spain, in favour of General Franco. At the same time the Soviet Government once again reaffirms its support of the Anglo-French plan of naval control which was submitted by our Chairman to the Sub-Committee on June 29th.¹¹¹

The majority of the Committee, however, decided to attempt a compromise between the Anglo-French and Italo-German plans, and the result was placed before the Committee on July 14th. The plan's main points were that the control system on land would be restored; naval patrol would be replaced by observers at Spanish ports and on ships bound for Spain, and belligerent rights were to be granted only when the Committee had decided that "substantial progress" had been made in the withdrawal of foreign volunteers. This plan was accepted as a basis for discussion. Maisky, however, noted that his Government would make certain important reservations at a later stage.¹¹²

These modifications led to a difference of opinion between the German and Soviet representatives. Maisky insisted that the question of the withdrawal of volunteers be discussed and acted upon first, whereas Ribbentrop, with support from Grandi, wanted belligerent rights to be granted at the earliest possible

¹¹¹ NIS, twenty-fourth meeting, July 9th 1937. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.147. The instructions which Ribbentrop received for this session, were typical of the German approach to the Committee. "In the tactics that you are to follow please bear in mind that we want above all to gain time, and we wish to make no proposals ourselves which it is the business of Franco or the Non-Intervention Committee to make." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.387, p.406. Bismarck to the Embassy in Britain. July 8th 1937.

¹¹² NIS, twenty-seventh meeting, July 16th 1937.

moment. Maisky added that if a solution of this problem could be reached, then he could induce his Government to modify its attitude to the question of belligerent rights.¹¹³

This deadlock continued, and if anything, deepened when Maisky asked Woermann whether he would agree,

without any qualifications, to the evacuation of foreign combatants from the forward line at once and subsequently from Spain itself within a short time to be precisely fixed by the Committee.¹¹⁴

Woermann's reply was as vague as Maisky's question had been precise: "Nothing is changed by the statement of the Soviet Ambassador and nothing could be changed by his questions to the individual representatives."¹¹⁵

The French Government attempted to induce the Russians to adopt a more "reasonable" attitude. On August 5th, Corbin saw Maisky and tried to convince him of the vulnerability of the USSR, if it did not modify its position. Maisky said that he was aware of his isolation but said that, if authorised, he would support the British plan, although in his opinion it was bound to fail.¹¹⁶ On the same day, in Moscow, Coulondre endeavoured to persuade Litvinov to adopt at least a compromise over the question of belligerent rights. Litvinov proved to be uncooperative.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ NIS, twenty-eighth meeting, July 17th 1937.

¹¹⁴ NIS (c), sixty-second meeting, August 6th 1937. See also, Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks" p.163.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.320. Corbin to Delbos, August 5th 1937. Eden had asked Corbin to use the French influence in Moscow to make the Russians more cooperative. See, *ibid.*, No.42. Corbin to Delbos, June 10th 1937. Corbin tried once more to persuade Maisky to be less intransigent, on July 30th, after Maisky's meeting with Chamberlain. See, *ibid.*, No.300, Corbin to Delbos, July 30th 1937.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Nos. 317,318. Coulondre to Delbos, August 5th 1937.

While visiting the Webbs on February 27th, Maisky had given the impression that the experience of the Non-Intervention Committee would make the USSR withdraw from any further collaboration with the Western Powers.¹¹⁸ He repeated this view on July 25th: "After the breakdown of non-intervention in Spain there will be an interval of isolation policy on the part of the U.K. and the USSR."¹¹⁹ This may have been wishful thinking on Maisky's part, for it seems probable that his personal isolation at the Committee, apart from the tedious nature of its work, represented a considerable strain over a period of eleven months.

Perhaps the best summing up of the Soviet position so far, and indeed of the work of the Committee itself, was given by Woermann on January 20th 1938:

The Soviet Union has isolated itself to an increasing extent through unskillful tactical procedure. Finally, in the decisive sessions, Ambassador Maisky has repeatedly retreated, which has not exactly increased his prestige. In the summer the Soviet Union involuntarily did us a good turn by its conduct, so that the big split before the summer recess was charged mainly to the account of the Soviet Union even by British public opinion. Still more than the Ambassador, the Jewish Counsellor of Embassy Kagan frequently aroused the impatience even of the British by his long and captious speeches.

The entire negotiation in the committee has something unreal about it, since all participants see through the game of the other side but only seldom express this openly. The fact that questions concerning which no one knows whether they will ever become actual, are discussed with great seriousness in all details, also contribute toward making the whole thing often appear more of a game than a reality. The non-intervention policy is so unstable and is such an artificial creation that everyone fears to cause its collapse by a clear

¹¹⁸ Webb, Vol.51, February 27th 1937, p.22. It is interesting to note that Beatrice Webb almost invariably described Maisky's mood as being one of self-satisfaction, self-confidence, or of "communist cocksureness."

¹¹⁹ Ibid., July 25th 1937, p.82.

"no" and then have to bear responsibility. Therefore unpleasant proposals are talked to death instead of rejected.120

While the Committee in London was absorbed in this almost unreal charade, the international focus shifted from Spain to the Mediterranean, where Mussolini had initiated his clandestine campaign against shipping carrying aid to Republican Spain.

By the autumn of 1937 the British Government seemed to be prepared to accept the virtual failure of non-intervention as such,¹ but hoped that if the Committee did nothing else it would at least ensure that the Spanish Civil War would not develop into a general European war. Chamberlain saw the conflict in Spain as an unwelcome obstacle in the way of his plans for rapprochement with Italy,² though Eden's attitude was more complicated. The French Foreign Minister, Delbos reported that on August 1st 1937 Eden had told him "that he would prefer to see Franco win and that he believed that Great Britain could make an agreement with Franco which would ensure the departure of Germans and Italians from Spain."³ However, in his memoirs Eden states, "From the early months of 1937, if I had had to choose I would have preferred a Government victory."⁴ If Eden's sympathy for the Republic was genuine, he certainly made no efforts to inject any life into the Non-intervention Committee, which staggered from deadlock to deadlock.

At this stage in the Spanish Civil War, if not earlier,

¹ Oliver Harvey, Eden's Private Secretary, and closest adviser in the Foreign Office, wrote in his diary that on March 11th 1937, Eden was "still convinced that Non-Intervention was the right policy and that the alternatives of intervention or warning-off Italians last summer would have created grave risk of war in a case where no British interests were involved." Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40", p.24.

² See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.594. On July 29th, 1937, Chamberlain had written a private letter to Mussolini suggesting talks. See Eden, p.445. Ciano, "Diplomatic Papers", p.132. Middlemas "Diplomacy of Illusion", p.179.

³ FRUS, 1937, Vol.1, p.69. See also, Cattell, "Soviet Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War", pp.88-89.

⁴ Eden, p.441.

the Soviet Government must have realised that Britain and France, whatever their public stance, were simply not prepared to take any concrete action to make the Non-intervention Agreement effective. Changes in Soviet policy towards Spain could therefore be expected.

The Soviet Union was also increasingly anxious about the continuing British efforts to come to terms with Italy over Spain, despite Mussolini's disregard of the Anglo-Italian "Gentleman's Agreement", and saw any such move as a possible step towards a resuscitation of the Four-Power Pact. The fear of a hostile combination of the four western Powers was a constant preoccupation of the Soviet press especially during the duration of the Spanish conflict.⁵ The Soviet press was also devoting an increasing amount of space to the other international problems on the horizon, both the Nazi threat to Central Europe, and the tension in the Far East where Japanese aggression in China and on the Soviet-Manchurian border had reached new levels.⁶

Added to this already tense situation was the series of attacks on shipping in the Mediterranean by "unknown" submarines and aircraft, many Soviet vessels being the victims of such attentions. Soviet shipping had in fact been subject to interference for several months. Maisky had supported the Scandinavian complaint to the Non-Intervention Committee on April 30th 1937. On May 5th he complained once again that, "between 30th October 1936 and 10th April 1937, eighty-four

⁵ See, Izvestia, March 16th and August 2nd 1937.

⁶ Izvestia, July 2nd 1937, reported the Russian protest at the Japanese shelling of a Soviet launch on the Amur River. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.217. Coulondre to Delbos, July 12th 1937.

Soviet ships had been interfered with, of which only one had been bound for a Spanish port."⁷ As far back as November 11th 1936, the "Soyuz Vodnikov" had been seized by Franco's Navy in Gibraltar Bay.⁸ On December 7th came reports that the "Kharkov" had been similarly held up.⁹ The sinking of the "Komsomol" on December 14th brought vociferous protests from the Soviet Government,¹⁰ and the press attacked the reluctance of the Non-Intervention Committee to take effective measures.

As is well known the rebels have committed a series of piratical acts against Scandinavian and Soviet vessels, and a considerable number of Soviet cargo ships have been seized illegally by the rebels.¹¹

These dep^aradations increased after Mussolini's decision to attack Soviet vessels bringing aid to the Republic. On August 3rd 1937, alarmed at reports of the arrival in the Republic of huge amounts of Russian military material, Franco requested Italy to take steps to stop Soviet vessels en route to Spain.¹² Ciano told Franco's emissary (his brother, Nicolas) that,

although the estimates regarding Russian transports might be somewhat exaggerated, the Duce was in principle still inclined to do everything he could to put a stop to them - not with surface vessels to be sure, but only with submarines, in Sicilian waters; in case the submarines had to surface, they would display the Spanish flag.¹³

⁷ NIS, twentieth meeting, May 5th 1937.

⁸ See, Izvestia, November 17th 1936.

⁹ See, Izvestia, December 7th 1936.

¹⁰ See, Izvestia, December 21st 1936.

¹¹ Izvestia, June 10th 1937.

¹² See DGFP, Series D, Vol.III. No.407, p.432. The Director of the Political Department to the Embassy in Italy, August 4th 1937.

¹³ Ibid., No.408, p.433. Hassell to the Foreign Ministry, August 5th 1937. See also, ibid., Nos.409 and 410.

As a result of Italian attacks, the Soviet ships "Timiryazev" and "Blagoev" were sunk on August 31st and September 1st respectively.

Soviet ships were not the only ones to suffer,¹⁴ and it is an indication of how little Mussolini felt he had to fear from the Western democracies that the attacks on neutral ships, including those of Britain and France, eventually became so frequent that the British Government was forced to react. The occasion for this was the attack on the British destroyer, H.M.S. Havock, on the night of August 31st - September 1st 1937.

Great Britain sent four more destroyers to the Mediterranean and Chamberlain agreed to the French proposal that a conference of "interested powers" be called.¹⁵ Thus on September 6th all states with Mediterranean frontiers, including Germany and the Soviet Union, but excluding Spain, were invited by Britain and France to a conference to be held at Nyon, Switzerland, on September 10th, to discuss the outbreak of piracy in the Mediterranean.¹⁶

¹⁴ See, Thomas "The Spanish Civil War" p.595. Thomas writes: "due partly to bad management, partly to the knowledge that Russian material was transported under other flags, many British French, and other neutral ships, aswell as Spanish vessels, were attacked in the Mediterranean by Italian submarines and by Italian aircraft operating from Majorca." Maisky explained to Dalton how Soviet aid was sent to the Republic, "It is very easy. When the Italians send men and arms to Franco in Italian ships they fly the Italian flag until they come to Spanish territorial waters and then they hoist the Spanish flag. There is no control over Spanish ships. It is just the same on the other side." Dalton, No.18, June 24th 1937.

¹⁵ Eden claims he played the major part in persuading the Cabinet to take action amid the "strange mood of masochism" which Britain displayed on hearing of the sinkings of British ships. Eden, p.461.

¹⁶ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.396. Circular from Delbos September 6th 1937. For the German invitation, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.414, p.440.

Moscow seems now to have been encouraged into believing that Britain and France might be prepared to create a firm front against Fascist aggression, however hesitantly:

It is possible that the piracy in the Mediterranean will cause leading English circles to change their views on many questions. Whether they will do this decisively and quickly enough will be shown during the next few days.¹⁷

The USSR's next move was to formally accuse Italy of the sinkings of the "Timiryazev" and the "Blagoev". A note was handed to Ciano by the Soviet Ambassador in Italy, on September 6th, demanding compensation and punishment of those guilty.¹⁸ The Soviet press had already indicated that the nationality of the "unknown" submarines was Italian.¹⁹ This formal protest therefore seems to have been made with the intention of offending Italy and thus keeping her out of the Conference.²⁰

The Soviet Union owed its own invitation to the French, who wanted Italy excluded, whereas Eden wished for Italian participation.²¹ The Soviet protest had its desired effect

¹⁷ Izvestia, September 4th 1937.

¹⁸ For the official TASS Communiqué, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.405. Levi to Delbos, September 7th 1937. Levi had replaced Payart as Chargé in the Moscow Embassy.

¹⁹ See, Izvestia, September 1st and 3rd 1937.

²⁰ The Italian Chargé in Berlin, Magistrati, told the Germans on September 6th, that the Soviet accusation would alter Italy's attitude to the proposed conference. On being informed that the USSR was among those invited, he replied that this "would probably make participation on the part of Italy impossible". DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.415, p.441. Memorandum by the Director of the Personnel Department, September 6th 1937.

²¹ See, Eden, p.462. See also, Vansittart to Ingram, September 7th 1937. PRO, FO371/21405, W16825/16618/41. Vansittart explained, "It was the French who insisted on Russia being invited, and we argued that in that case Germany would have to be invited as well. A compromise on this basis was ultimately agreed upon but we throughout were strongly opposed in principle to either of these countries being included on the ground that they were not Mediterranean powers and therefore not to take part in the policing of that sea." On September 3rd, Cambon informed Eden that the French government desired to invite the Black Sea Powers. Eden thought otherwise. Apart from this exchange of views, the French documents contain no further reference to this Anglo-French difference of opinion. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.391. Cambon to Delbos, September 3rd 1937.

and the Italians declined to take part in the Conference,²² as did Germany, who suggested that the whole matter should be dealt with at the Non-Intervention Committee.²³ Ingram reported to Eden from Rome that Ciano had been prepared to give an affirmative answer to the Italian invitation, but in view of the Soviet note Italy would find it difficult to attend the Conference.²⁴ Eden replied, urging Ingram to tell Ciano that to refuse to attend would be to play into Soviet hands. Eden's "advice" was ignored.²⁵

If any Soviet hopes existed that Britain and France were about to draw closer to the USSR in the cause of collective security, then they were to be disappointed. For the British and French Governments, despite minor differences of approach to the problem of piracy,²⁶ were more concerned to solve this problem in isolation and to continue their efforts to come to terms with Italy and Germany, than to form a united anti-Fascist front with the Soviet Union. On September 7th, Eden asked Corbin if France could use her influence in Moscow to moderate Soviet press attacks on Italy. Corbin observed that this would be difficult and that if Italy thought the Soviet accusations

²² For the Italian refusal, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.414.

²³ See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.417.

²⁴ Ingram to Eden, September 6th 1937. PRO, FO371/21404, W16755/16618/41.

²⁵ Eden to Ingram, September 6th 1937. PRO, FO371/21404, W16757/16618/41.

²⁶ Minutes of a F.O. Meeting, September 6th 1937. PRO, FO371/21404, W16802/16618/41. Apart from the disagreement over the invitations of Italy and Russia, France wished to include submarines, aircraft and mines on the agenda, whereas Britain wished only submarines to be discussed. Also Delbos wanted the Spanish Republican Government to be invited, and Eden did not. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.397. Cambon to Delbos, September 6th 1937.

were a plot to wreck the Nyon Conference, they should ignore them.²⁷ Even the choice of Nyon²⁸ as the venue for the Conference had been made with the Italian sensitiveness to Geneva in mind, but neither this nor Eden's efforts,²⁹ could persuade Mussolini to change his mind.

Whatever the realities of the situation, the Soviet Government chose to refer to the calling of the Nyon Conference in terms which gave the impression that collective security was again a distinct diplomatic possibility. Even the Soviet note accepting the invitation to Nyon was studded with references to 'peace' and 'security', though it included further open accusations of Italy:

It is abundantly clear that these aggressive actions perpetrated on the high seas and directed against the shipping of peace-loving governments, constitutes a direct threat to European security and universal peace.

In view of the foregoing considerations the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is ready to take part in the conference called by the initiative of the French and British Governments for September 10th for the purpose of discussing the question of measures to be taken in order to ensure the safety of shipping on the high seas, which constitutes one of the foundations of peace.³⁰

The Soviet Government in this reply also asked the reasons for the inclusion of Germany in the conference when she was not a Mediterranean Power, and suggested that the Government of the Spanish Republic should be invited. The British

²⁷ See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol. VI, No.403. Corbin to Delbos, September 7th 1937.

²⁸ See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.413, p.439. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, September 3rd 1937. See also, *ibid.*, No.422.

²⁹ For the record of Eden's attempts to persuade Guido Crolla, the Italian Chargé, that Italy should attend the Conference, see, Eden to Ingram, September 7th 1937. PRO, FO371/21405, W16685/16618/41.

³⁰ For the text of the Soviet acceptance, see, Chilston to Eden, September 7th 1937. PRO, FO371/21405, W16855/16618/41. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.405. Levi to Delbos, September 7th 1937.

Government replied to neither of these points, partly because Germany had already followed Italy's lead in refusing to take part in the conference.

The Nyon Conference thus opened at 4.30 p.m. on September 10th, without the participation of Germany and Italy. Litvinov, the Soviet representative, used the opportunity to make a lengthy speech on the theme of collective security:

Pursuing as it does a consistent policy of defending the idea of collective security, the Soviet Government was bound to respond to an appeal for the collective organisation of security for peaceful navigation by sea, and in particular on such an important international maritime highway as the Mediterranean.³¹

Litvinov pointed at the Italian guilt for the submarine attacks:

Only those states can avoid participating in such a conference if, while possessing a commercial fleet and utilising the Mediterranean, they consider themselves guaranteed against piracy, either because they organise it themselves as an instrument of their national policy or because of their extreme intimacy with the pirates and ability to come to an understanding with them....Everyone knows the object of this piracy, and what state is pursuing that object; its name is on everyone's lips, even though it may not be pronounced in this hall.

Litvinov concluded on a note of realism:

The history of international organisations and international conferences in recent years gives no ground for excessive optimism in this respect. But at the same time the Soviet Government is ready to take its part also in collective measures for the defence of the common interests of States which are not guaranteed against piracy.³²

Delbos, as president of the Conference, had hoped to avoid such public declarations, a view of which Litvinov strongly disapproved. After this sharp exchange, the Conference went

³¹ U.K. Delegation, Geneva, September 12th 1937. (First Plenary Meeting of the Nyon Conference - Public, September 10th 1937.) PRO, FO371/21406, W17261/16618/41. For Comptes Rendus of the private sessions of the Conference, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, Nos.423, 426 and 460.

³² Ibid.

into private session at 5.40 p.m.

The delegates then began their work, which they accomplished with remarkable speed and efficiency.³³ A naval patrol scheme for the Mediterranean was established, by which the British and French fleets were to cover the area west of Malta, with powers to attack any suspicious submarine (this was extended to include aircraft by the Conference's naval experts on September 17th). The Agreement was then signed on 14th September.³⁴ The submarine attacks promptly ceased and attacks by aircraft were considerably reduced.

One aspect of the Conference which Moscow no doubt found disturbing was the marked reluctance of the Eastern Mediterranean states to have any cooperation whatsoever from the Soviet Union. This tendency made itself apparent during conversations between the heads of delegations, on the evening of the tenth and morning of the eleventh, concerning the allocation of patrol zones. Eden states that at one point Russian intransigence seemed likely to jeopardize the whole Conference.³⁵ However, Litvinov eventually agreed to accept a plan by which the French and British Admiralties reserved the right to call upon the Russian Navy for assistance, if necessary.³⁶ The attitude of the smaller states eased "as soon as it became

³³ For a brief account of the Nyon Conference with some interesting journalistic touches, see, W.L.Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "The Policy of Simmering" (The Hague, 1962), pp.66-71. Kleine-Ahlbrandt suggests that the unpleasant weather at Nyon may have had some effect on the speed of the negotiations.

³⁴ For the text of the Nyon Agreement, see, PRO, FO371/21406, W17378/16618/41.

³⁵ Eden, p.466.

³⁶ U.K. Delegation, Geneva, (Eden), September 15th 1937. PRO, FO371/21406, W17396/16618/41. See also Eden, p.467. Harvey remarked upon the hostility of the British Admiralty to the Nyon Agreement, "Admiralty as usual defeatist. They are determined to do nothing which might injure Franco. They hated Nyon." Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940", p.152.

apparent that M. Litvinov did not intend to claim participation for the Russian Navy in the protection measures in the Mediterranean."³⁷ Eden attributes Litvinov's acceptance, to his surprise at the Soviet Union's unpopularity among the small states, "Which did not hold a lofty view of Soviet intentions", and to wisdom in not wanting to give publicity to this situation.³⁸ A little of Litvinov's confusion is evident in his closing speech:

I have to say that none of our proposals were prompted by egotistical or by purely national considerations... Our objections to the regional proposal for dividing the Mediterranean into zones, each separately protected by the naval forces of the respective states present here, including the U.S.S.R., were entirely eliminated by the subsequent friendly agreement of Great Britain and France to undertake the entire defence of the Mediterranean from one end to the other.

May I be permitted to remind you, gentlemen, that at the very beginning of the Spanish conflict the Soviet Government proposed to leave entirely to Great Britain and France the control around Spain and, that at a later stage it voluntarily renounced its part in the naval control in the Mediterranean accorded to it by the London Committee... I spoke against the system which included the participation of Soviet naval forces....We would have wished to have taken several further steps along the way which we have followed together here, but the history of the Disarmament Conference and of other international conferences has already proved that the young Soviet state, full of vigour, energy, courage and of faith in the justice of its international concepts, is always ready to come to the fore and to proceed rapidly along the path of the defence of peace and also to act more resolutely than certain other states.³⁹

³⁷ DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.426, note 1. See also, *ibid.*, No.452. Massigli to the Foreign Ministry, September 15th 1937. Massigli commented on the coolness between Litvinov and Aras during the Conference. Eden also noted Turkey's marked unwillingness to have any cooperation with the Russians. Eden, p.466.

³⁸ Eden, p.467.

³⁹ Report of second Plenary Meeting, Public, September 14th 1937. See also, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.448. Litvinov's reference to the proposal to divide the Mediterranean into separate zones, each patrolled by a joint naval force of the Nyon signatory Powers, was of Soviet origin. Delbos and Eden prevailed with their proposal of separate zones for each country, (in the event, France and Britain), the Tyrrhenian Sea area being reserved for possible future Italian participation in the scheme.

Despite the setback to Soviet "amour propre", Litvinov appeared to be pleased with the outcome of the Nyon Conference, though he was critical of the exclusion of the Spanish Republic from the patrol scheme. He summed up the attitude of his Government in the following manner:

Moreover this agreement represents a partial realisation of the ideas of collective security and likewise of the idea of regional agreements. The rapid success of this Conference, like that of last years Conference at Montreux, can be explained, I believe, principally by the fact that those who took part in both Conferences belong to the peace front and they take their stand on the ground of collective security, regional agreements, inviolability of international obligations and other ideas which constitute the basis of the League Covenant. The experience of the two Conferences I have mentioned shows that it is only on the basis of these ideas that useful international collaboration is possible for the elimination of the perils threatening the peace and security of nations. This conclusion, in my opinion, adds particular importance to the Nyon Arrangement.⁴⁰

The Soviet press, in its evaluation of the results of the Nyon Conference, similarly emphasised their importance to the creation of a system of collective security, but with little justification, gave much of the credit for the success of the Conference to the Government of the USSR, "The Nyon Conference was called on the initiative of England and France, but concrete results were produced only thanks to the actions of Soviet diplomacy."⁴¹ Izvestia criticized the exclusion of Republican Spain, but expressed satisfaction at the naval arrangements and the acknowledgement of Soviet freedom of independent action:

⁴⁰ Ibid. See also, Degras, Vol.III, p.253-255.

⁴¹ Izvestia, September 14th 1937. It is interesting to note that when the Soviet delegation was forced to concede a point, this was interpreted as a Russian contribution to the success at Nyon. At Montreux, just over a year earlier, the British delegation, which conceded almost every point, was castigated by the Soviet press for using obstructionist tactics.

The Nyon agreement recognises our interest in the Mediterranean, and the right of the USSR, as one of the participants in the agreement, to send its warships, if necessary to any part of the Mediterranean.⁴²

While giving credit to Litvinov's skill, Maisky explains the success of Nyon by pointing to what he felt was a change in the attitude of Britain and France:

Since the interests of influential capitalist groups were involved here, the British and French representatives at Nyon took up an entirely different position from those in the Committee for 'Non-intervention'.⁴³

These Soviet comments on the Nyon Conference show how seriously the Government of the USSR had misjudged the intentions of Britain and France in calling the Conference. The strong measures adopted at Nyon were not the result of a sudden Anglo-French awakening to the threat posed by Italy and Germany, but solely an attempt to eliminate the piracy in the Mediterranean, hopefully without prejudicing the chances of re-establishing good relations with Mussolini. Churchill saw Nyon as "a proof of how powerful the combined influence of Britain and France, if expressed with conviction and a readiness to use force, could have been upon the mood and policy of the Dictators".⁴⁴

However, Eden's own comments on the Conference at Nyon demonstrate how wide was the gulf between British and Soviet views of the same event:

We have reserved an area for Italy which was not contemplated under the original scheme before the Cabinet, and perhaps most important of all we have managed to keep the Russians out of the Mediterranean.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.166.

⁴⁴ W.S.Churchill, "The Second World War", Vol.I: "The Gathering Storm", (London, 1948), p.194.

Eden mentioned again that he had done his utmost to bring about Italian participation, but apart from this,

My own chief anxiety in coming to Nyon was lest we should appear to create an Anglo-French-Soviet bloc on an ideological basis. That event even the German and Italian press admit that we have avoided.⁴⁵

Chamberlain was even more anxious than Eden to avoid offending the Italians. Commenting on the Nyon Conference in his diary, he wrote that the Italians "made the Russian note a pretext for abstention as the Russians meant they should, and now with intense chagrin they see collaboration between the British and French fleets of a kind never known before....It would be amusing, if it were not also dangerous".⁴⁶

The Nyon Conference greatly increased Anglo-French cooperation, to the extent almost of full staff talks. Blum, was however, much more enthusiastic about Nyon than Chamberlain. He told Dalton on September 14th that he considered the Agreement to be "excellent" and that Germany and Italy had been guilty of gross stupidity in not accepting their invitations, "He hoped that supplies from Russia would now reach Spain as before the submarine blockade."⁴⁷

However, the hopes which Litvinov had expressed on September 14th, were soon dashed when Britain and France began

⁴⁵ U.K. Delegation, Geneva, (Eden), September 15th 1937. PRO, FO371/21406, W17396/16618/41. Whereas Eden had specifically stated that he did not want to create an Anglo-French-Soviet alignment, Blum told Dalton that such a bloc would represent a powerful nucleus. See, Dalton, No.18, September 14th 1937.

⁴⁶ K.Feiling, "The Life of Neville Chamberlain", (London, 1946), p.331. For Chamberlain's desire to please Mussolini by recognition of his conquest of Abyssinia see, CAB 23/89, September 8th 1937. See also, Middlemas, "Diplomacy of Illusion", p.131. For Harvey's account of the differences of approach between Eden and Chamberlain, see, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940", pp. 47-48.

⁴⁷ Dalton, No.18, September 14th 1937.

to negotiate with Italy in order to include her in the patrol scheme. On September 18th the texts of the Nyon agreement were given to Ciano who had, three days previously, asked for "parity of duties" with the other participants in the agreement. By the 30th September, the Italians were included in the Nyon scheme.⁴⁸ Despite assurances to the contrary, Italian aid to the Spanish Nationalists continued,⁴⁹ mainly through the patrol zone between the Balearics, Sardinia and the Tyrrhenian Sea which had been allotted to Italy⁵⁰ in the naval talks with Britain and France in Paris.

At the meetings of the League in September, Great Britain and France exerted their influence to ensure that the League resolution on Spain was as innocuous as possible. The mild threat to end the policy of Non-intervention "in the near future" if no result was obtained,⁵¹ carried little weight while Britain and France were wooing Mussolini. By this time the USSR must have realised that the "triumph"

⁴⁸ For details of the gradual association of Italy with the Nyon Agreement, see, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, Nos.441,442, 436, 453, 455, 462, 469, 473, 477, 485, 494 and 500.

⁴⁹ The Italian Ambassador to Franco told Heberlein, the German Chargé, that the Nyon Agreement meant that Soviet aid to the Republic would increase, thus "the only remedy would be to increase correspondingly Italian and German support of Franco in order to prevent the victory of the Spanish Nationalist cause from being jeopardized." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.419, p.444. Heberlein to the Foreign Ministry, September 16th 1937. Henderson reported a bizarre German press attack on the USSR which stated, "Moscow will have unrestricted use of the Dardanelles as the channel for pouring out Bolshevism, and even torpedo its own ships in order to substantiate its accusations and to further the policy of 'divide et impera'." Henderson, Berlin, September 13th 1937, PRO, FO371/21406, W17265/16618/41.

⁵⁰ Ciano described himself as a "pirate now turned policeman". Ciano, "Diaries 1937-8", p.15. For the text of the Anglo-French-Italian Naval Agreement of September 30th 1937, see, Phipps to Eden, October 18th 1937. PRO, FO371/21361, W19251/23/41.

⁵¹ See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.608.

of Nyon was to be shortlived. It is difficult to believe that Moscow still had any illusions concerning the supposed British and French commitment to the policy of collective security, though, whatever its shortcomings, the Nyon Conference did have the distinction of being the only effective measure against the aggressor nations that the three non-fascist Powers took in concert during the 1930s.

In London the "leaky dam" continued to leak.⁵² the Non-Intervention Committee remained in existence until April 20th, 1939, that is, for another twenty months during which both the Committee proper and the Sub-Committee met only fitfully and achieved little of any consequence.⁵³ Nevertheless the Soviet Union remained a member of the Committee almost until the end, earning the abuse of Italy and Germany and the disfavour of Britain and France.

On October 16th 1937, discussion of the British compromise control plan was resumed. Corbin put forward a proposal that there should be an immediate withdrawal of foreign volunteers in proportion to the forces involved on either side (the so-

⁵² This was Eden's metaphor, see, Thomas "The Spanish Civil War" p.31 in E.Luard ed., "The International Regulation of Civil Wars", (London, 1972).

⁵³ In the film "To Die in Madrid", a clever compilation of film of Spain today and Civil War newsreel footage, the director Frederic Rossif uses a loop of film to demonstrate the futility of the London Committee, the principal members of which are shown perpetually entering the Foreign Office, at a speed which suggests a merry-go-round.

One historian of the Spanish Civil War states that the negotiations which took place in the Committee until its end, were "long and drawn out, impossibly boring, and add nothing to what has already been said." Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "The Policy of Simmering", p.84. There is some truth in this view, though the behaviour of the various delegates in the rarefied air of the Committee throws much light on the attitude of their respective Governments.

called symbolic withdrawal).⁵⁴ This was to be followed by the beginning of complete withdrawal, upon which having reached an adequate level, both parties in Spain would be accorded limited belligerent rights. Then would come the complete withdrawal of all the volunteers. The Soviet attitude was still that belligerent rights were not to be granted prior to the complete withdrawal of foreign combatants. Maisky realised the delicacy of his position.⁵⁵ To vote against proposals so obviously favoured by the principal delegates would be to draw upon the Soviet Union all the blame for the failure of the Non-Intervention scheme. Maisky therefore limited his opposition to words, declaring in a general denouncement of the whole policy of Non-Intervention, that his Government could not,

take upon itself in the slightest degree the responsibility for such a policy, which has already proved to a sufficient extent its worthlessness, and which at the same time has detrimentally and iniquitously reacted upon the interests of the Spanish people and its legitimate Government. If the French British and other Governments consider it necessary to continue this policy and still entertain some belief in the possibility of its success, the Soviet Government does not intend to create for these other Governments any difficulties with regard to such a policy, but declines any responsibility for same.⁵⁶

More specifically, in relation to the Soviet stand on the question of belligerent rights, Maisky accused some members of the Committee of using this Soviet attitude as "a pretext to talk

⁵⁴ Corbin had predicted on July 27th, that, "The decisive battle will take place over the word "substantial" which marks the correlation to be established between the withdrawal of volunteers and the recognition of belligerent rights." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.275. Corbin to Delbos, July 27th 1937.

⁵⁵ This did not prevent the Soviet press from making its usual attacks on what it took to be western collusion with Italy and Germany to defeat the Republic. See, Pravda, October 10th, 11th, 12th 1938.

⁵⁶ NIS (c), sixty-fifth meeting, October 19th 1937.

of Soviet 'sabotage' of the Committee's work, and as an attempt to throw in advance the whole blame for the possible breakdown of non-intervention on to the shoulders of my Government."⁵⁷ Maisky did, however, intimate that his Government might be prepared to examine the question of belligerent rights when "the bulk of the volunteers had been withdrawn."⁵⁸

Maisky was correct in his estimate of the intentions of Italy and Germany. All their actions in the Committee had the motives of wasting time, isolating the Soviet Union and of putting Maisky in the position of troublemaker. With this in mind Grandi had told Eden on October 20th that Italy was prepared to accept Corbin's plan. At the next meeting, on October 22nd, Grandi stated that he could not bind himself to accept the figures for volunteers on each side to be found by the investigating commissions as establishing the proportions for the withdrawals. Eden and Harvey realised that Italy was only playing for time.⁵⁹

Woermann was more skillful than his Italian colleague in the game of isolating Maisky, and was often critical of Grandi's

⁵⁷ Maisky's suspicions were well founded. Woermann wrote on October 27th, "The positive stand which Germany intends taking on the report is calculated to fix the blame for a possible collapse of non-intervention clearly upon the Soviet Union." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.426, p.451, Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, October 2nd 1937.

⁵⁸ NIS (c), sixty-eighth meeting, October 26th 1937.

⁵⁹ See, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940", pp.53-54. Eden took the chair at the meetings of the 19th, 20th and 22nd. Harvey commented that, compared with the Italian behaviour, "the Soviet attitude, which was that Russia could not agree now to give belligerent rights when a certain stage in the withdrawals had been reached, was at least honest because it had never been dissembled."

tactics.⁶⁰ On October 17th, he sent the Foreign Ministry a careful resumé of the situation at the London Committee and of how best the Soviet Union might be embarrassed. He concluded:

We are of the opinion here that the better course would be to leave the Soviet Union in the game as a troublemaker, since we would then more readily find an alibi in difficult situations, and, if the particular circumstances render it desirable we could more easily pursue dilatory tactics...⁶¹

On October 21st, Neurath instructed Woermann to insist upon the granting of belligerent rights to Franco "only up to the point that Russian opposition to this is thereby increased." With the same aim of isolating the USSR Woermann was also "to insist absolutely on having all resolutions accepted unanimously, that is also by the Russians."⁶² The collapse of the Committee was, however, not to the German or Italian advantage; so Woermann was to discuss the British plan at length.⁶³ After the British plan had been accepted Ribbentrop wrote:

Our acceptance of the British plan became inevitable as a result of the tempo proposed by the Italians. I consider acceptance as not dangerous, however, since we have a whole series of possibilities for playing for time as long as desired.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ After the meeting of October 19th, Woermann had criticized Grandi for having spoken before Maisky, as this provided no further opportunity to take advantage of the negative Soviet attitude. See DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.446, p.470. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, October 19th 1937.

⁶¹ Ibid., No.441, p.465. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, October 17th 1937.

⁶² Ibid., No.451, p.474. Neurath to the Embassy in Great Britain, October 21st 1937. See also, ibid., Nos.438 and 439.

⁶³ See, ibid., No.456, p.484. Neurath to the Embassy in Great Britain, October 25th 1937.

⁶⁴ Ibid., No.459, p.490. Ribbentrop to the Foreign Ministry, October 27th 1937. For documents of a similar nature see, ibid., Nos.452,453, 457 and 491. The French had realized as early as August 1937 that Russian intransigence was a gift to the Nazi propaganda machine. See, DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.332. Arnal to Delbos, August 13th 1937. Pierre Arnal, Counsellor at the French Embassy in Berlin.

The Committee had by this time developed a logic of its own, with only a tenuous connection with actual events in Spain. In this situation Maisky had to maintain as far as possible the Soviet public point of view. After the Soviet disappointment at the eventual outcome of the Nyon Agreements and the consistent ineffectiveness of the Committee, Moscow had evidently decided to remain a member of the Committee, abstaining on vital points but not being prepared to cast a negative vote over a point of principle. This was demonstrated on November 4th 1937, when a plenary session of the Committee, after prolonged and tedious negotiations, finally accepted what was virtually the British plan of July 14th 1937. Maisky relates that, after months of opposition to the granting of belligerent rights, he was instructed to abstain over this particular measure, but to accept the resolution's other points:⁶⁵

Bearing in mind, however, that a negative vote on the part of my Government would kill the whole plan for the evacuation of foreign nationals, and desiring at the same time to contribute to the ensurance of real non-intervention, the Soviet Government instructed me to accept the draft resolution with this reservation: that I abstain from voting on those parts of the resolution which deal with the question of belligerent rights.⁶⁶

However, the anti-Soviet campaign of the Fascist Powers eventually prompted Moscow to change its position and accept the resolution 'in toto' which it did on November 16th. Maisky explained the change in attitude thus: "The Soviet Government

⁶⁵ See Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.170.

⁶⁶ NIS, twenty-eighth meeting, November 4th 1937. The resolution which was adopted involved asking both parties in Spain to cooperate in accepting two commissions to count the foreigners in their areas and effecting the withdrawal. The Germans objected to the Russian abstention as in their view "it would release the Russians from a commitment which is especially onerous to them and on the other hand leave them every possibility for maneuvers to disturb the Committee." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.462. Neurath to the Embassy in Great Britain, November 1st 1937.

in its fight to thwart these attempts (to bypass the Soviet objections) showed not only firmness but its characteristic flexibility as well." He added, "In this way the U.S.S.R. by accepting the resolution in its entirety lost nothing essential and gained much tactically."⁶⁷

The next skirmish in Maisky's skillful rearguard action arose over the question of financing the evacuation of the foreign volunteers. Ribbentrop and Grandi wanted the expense to be divided evenly between the five major Powers. Understandably, Maisky suggested that the expense should be shared amongst the same Powers in proportion to the numbers of their citizens fighting in Spain, and refused to countenance the German-Italian plan.⁶⁸ No final decision was taken on this point, nor was the question of an acceptable definition of the term "substantial progress" in the withdrawal of foreign combatants settled. (The Soviet Government regarded 80-85% as a basis for action, whereas Britain and France were prepared to accept a figure of 75%).⁶⁹ There followed another lengthy lapse in the work of the Committee, a lapse caused as much by the Committee's inherent lassitude as by the deteriorating international situation.

In the period between the Sub-Committee meeting of February 3rd 1938 and its next, on March 31st, Nazi Germany

⁶⁷ Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.169.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.171.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.171-172. Germany and Italy decided to regard 40-50% as a reasonable figure, but to hold out for 20% if possible. They would not compromise until sufficient time had elapsed. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.505, p.562. Weizsäcker to the Embassy in Italy, January 18th 1938. See also, ibid., No.518. On January 23rd 1938, Maisky visited the Webbs for Beatrice's eightieth birthday celebrations. She wrote in her diary, "He implied that he had checked the fascist powers on the Intervention Committee (sic) by delaying any settlement in Spain which would entail belligerent rights. Italy could not afford to send many more soldiers so the withdrawal of volunteers was unimportant!" Webb, Vol.52, January 23rd 1938. pp.12-13.

occupied Austria, with virtually no reaction from the Western democracies. Litvinov's proposal of an international conference to deal with the problems raised by German action was rejected as being 'premature' by Great Britain. This clear evidence of British intentions, or rather the lack of them, came after the failure of the Brussels Conference in November 1937, and Eden's resignation in February 21st 1938, over Chamberlain's overtures to Mussolini.⁷⁰ The Anglo-Italian rapprochement continued, despite renewed Italian submarine activity,⁷¹ and on April 16th 1938⁷² an agreement was signed which included a promise from Mussolini to withdraw his troops from Spain in accordance with the wishes of the Non-Intervention Committee,⁷³ in return for British recognition of the status quo in the Mediterranean once the war in Spain was over.

In the face of this British attitude to the Non-Intervention Committee, which was tantamount to open acknowledgement of the presence of Italian troops in Spain, the Soviet Government attributed less and less importance to the Committee.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ For details of the causes and effects of Eden's resignation, see, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940", pp.71-104. Eden, 586-604. Grandi informed Woermann that he intended "to take immediate advantage of the situation created by Eden's resignation." He did this by accepting proposals concerning the volunteer question in order to give Chamberlain a success. DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.583, p.603. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, February 21st 1938.

⁷¹ See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.647.

⁷² For the British correspondence relating to this agreement, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.III, Ch.VI.

⁷³ Italy had been informed that, "HMG regard a settlement of the Spanish question as a prerequisite of the entry into force of the agreement." Ibid, No.326. Ciano described the Italian attitude to the Agreement, "(Mussolini) absolutely refuses to compromise - we shall not modify our policy towards Franco in the slightest degree and the agreement with London will come into force when God pleases. If indeed it ever will". Ciano, "Diaries 1937-8", p.130.

⁷⁴ See, A.A.Gromyko et al. eds., "SSSR v bor'be za mir nakanune vtoroi mirovoi voini, sentyabr' 1938g.- avgust 1939g." (Moscow, 1971), (Hereinafter: "SSSR v bor'be za mir.") These documents contain very few significant references to the Spanish question.

The Sub-Committee met again on March 31st, 1938 when the question of the definition of 'substantial progress' was again raised, but was not settled.⁷⁵ Another pause followed, during which the Spanish Republic suffered further reverses, before a series of meetings took place on May 26th, and 31st, June 2nd, 21st, 24th, 28th and 30th. Maisky was on leave in the USSR⁷⁶ during this minor resuscitation of the Committee's work, which was perhaps some indication of the lack of importance given to the activities of the Committee by the USSR. As usual Maisky's place was taken by Kagan.

This series of meetings settled at long last the problem of the meaning of the term "substantial progress" in the withdrawal of foreign nationals. The figure accepted by the Sub-Committee was approximately 75%, whereas Maisky had wanted 80-85% to be the accepted percentage, nonetheless Maisky claims that, "...the USSR succeeded in gaining an important point here."⁷⁷ The financial question was also solved by a compromise which split the expenses of the evacuation apparatus between the five major Powers. The cost of keeping the foreign combatants in pre-evacuation transit camps was to be paid for by the Nationalist and Republican Governments, while the actual

⁷⁵ Woermann noted, "The meeting was obviously called by Plymouth principally in order to demonstrate to British public opinion that the work of the Non-Intervention Committee is progressing. Probably no one believes any longer that a withdrawal of the volunteers can actually be carried out by the methods of the present plan." DGFP, Series D, Vol. III, No. 556, p. 630. Woermann to the Foreign Ministry, March 31st 1938.

⁷⁶ See, Maisky "Spanish Notebooks", p. 191. Webb, Vol. 52, May 16th, p. 58. Beatrice recorded that Litvinov had warned Maisky that he might be required to return to his post early. Maisky returned to London at the end of July, 1938. See Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p. 200.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

evacuation was to be paid for by the governments from which the combatants originated. As Maisky put it, "here also the USSR had no cause for complaint",⁷⁸ not least perhaps, because the Soviet Union had "not contributed a bean to the Non-Intervention Board for a very long time..."⁷⁹

On July 5th 1938, a plenary meeting of the Committee was held, the first since November 4th 1937, under the Chairmanship of Lord Halifax, the new British Foreign Secretary. His opening speech was notable for its totally groundless optimism concerning the future of this "very complicated piece of real international cooperation."⁸⁰ The Committee then unanimously

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.193.

⁷⁹ Minute by F.O. official, March 16th 1939. PRO, F0371/24117, W4407/5/41. On November 9th, Bismarck had criticised the USSR which "remained consistent on only one point; it refuses to continue to pay the contributions to which it obligated itself along with the other non-intervention powers." DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.466, p.505. The Foreign Ministry to Various Diplomatic Missions, November 9th 1937. Schulenburg reported on Chilston's and Coulondre's attempts to induce the USSR to participate in defraying the expenses occasioned by the withdrawal of foreign volunteers from Spain. "At first Litvinov rejected any Soviet participation on the ground that the Soviet Union could not be expected to pay for removing Germans and Italians. He at first did not want to concede Lord Chilston's objection that Soviet volunteers, too, were in Spain. Finally Lord Chilston proposed to Litvinov that the Soviet Union obligate itself to assume the costs arising in case Soviet volunteers were found to be in Spain and had to be removed. Litvinov agreed to this proposal." Ibid., No.630, p.713. Memorandum by Schulenburg, July 5th 1938. Litvinov's reply was as academic as Chilston's question.

⁸⁰ MIS, twenty-ninth meeting, July 5th 1938. Halifax later wrote of the Committee, "I doubt whether a single man or gun less reached either side as a result of its activities. What however, it did do was to keep such intervention as there was entirely unofficial, to be denied or at least deprecated by the responsible spokesman of the nation concerned, so that there was neither need nor occasion for any official action by Governments to support their nationals. After making every allowance for the unreality, make-believe, and discredit that came to attack to the Non-Intervention Committee, I think this device for lowering the temperature caused by the Spanish fever justified itself." Lord Halifax, "Fulness of Days", (London, 1957), p.192.

adopted the final version of the British plan, though few, if any, of the delegates can have been under any illusions as to its probable fate. This was not quite the last meeting of the Committee, as Maisky states,⁸¹ for it was to meet once more, on April 20th 1939, when it dissolved itself,⁸² though without the participation of the Soviet Union. On March 3rd 1939, the USSR formally withdrew from the Non-Intervention Committee:

In view of the fact that the London Non-Intervention Committee has long since ceased to function, and has lost any reason for existing, the Soviet Government decided on March 1st of this year, to recall its representative on the Non-Intervention Committee.⁸³

The reasons for the eventual withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the London Committee were far from obscure. The Czechoslovakian crisis had not led to a last minute consolidation of collective forces, but to the Four Power agreement at Munich where the fate of Czechoslovakia was settled without the participation of the Soviet Union. As far as Spain was concerned, Britain and France had officially recognised the Franco regime on February 27th 1939, an action which made the London Committee somewhat more redundant than before. The Spanish Civil War itself, lasted only three more weeks. Thus membership of the Committee was for the Soviet Government of no further value; no propaganda points could be made in a

⁸¹ See, Maisky, "Spanish Notebooks", p.194.

⁸² NIS, thirtieth meeting, April 20th 1939.

⁸³ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.142, p.223. TASS communiqué on the recall of the USSR representative from the Committee for Non-Intervention, March 4th 1939. See also, Soviet Ambassador to Plymouth, March 3rd 1939. PRO, FO371/24117, W4407/5/41. Corbin told Plymouth on March 14th that he had received no notification of the Soviet decision. Cadogan minuted, "Perhaps we can ignore the "secession" of the Soviet Govt. Its formal notification w(oul)d give an excuse to the totalitarian states to say that the Soviets were now actively fanning the embers of revolt." Record of a Conversation between Corbin and Plymouth, March 14th 1939. PRO, FO371/24117, W4751/5/41.

gathering as meaningless as that in London now that, "The notorious Four Power Pact had come into existence at Munich, its sharp edge turned against the USSR."⁸⁴

The official Soviet explanation of its part in the Non-Intervention Committee is that the USSR joined the Committee in response to the request of its French ally, in order to prevent a European war. When it became obvious that the Non-Intervention Committee was not functioning as intended, the Soviet Union began to send aid to the Spanish Republic, although it remained a member of the Committee in the hope that its firm stand against the Fascist Powers and against the equivocal attitude of Great Britain and France would eventually enable the Committee to become effective.

This view, which stressed the devotion of the Soviet Union to the causes of peace, collective security and the rights of the people of the Spanish Republic, gained widespread support among left-wing intellectuals, trade unionists and anti-fascists of no other political affiliation, and even today is often accepted as the version closest to the true pattern of events. The acceptance of this view is a tribute to the effectiveness of Soviet propaganda, which was able so successfully to present the USSR as the sole bastion of peace, the sole supporter of the Spanish Republic, and the sole champion of the policy of collective security.

Soviet policy with regard to Spain was naturally part of Soviet foreign policy as a whole, the principal aim of which was to ensure the security of the USSR. This policy had two possible lines of development; an accommodation with the aggressive Powers, or an alignment involving the western

⁸⁴ Maisky, "Who helped Hitler", p.89. Two weeks after the Soviet withdrawal from the Committee Litvinov proposed the calling of an international conference to deal with the supposed German threat to Roumania.

democracies, i.e. collective security. Soviet Spanish policy must therefore be seen in this context, as one facet of collective security, a policy serving the interests of the USSR alone.

Despite the wealth of evidence confirming this view, few contemporaries of the events in Spain could sufficiently disassociate themselves from the sense of personal disillusion which an admission of the facts would have entailed. George Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" is one exception, relating the confusion and increasing distaste for the Soviet inspired slaughter of its political "opponents" behind the front.⁸⁵ "El Campesino" (Valentin Gonzalez) a prominent Communist supporter of the Republic, voiced his disillusionment on his return from the USSR ten years after the end of the Spanish Civil War:

I sincerely believed that the Kremlin sent us its arms, its military and political advisers, and the international Brigades under its control, as a proof of its revolutionary solidarity....Only later did I realize that the Kremlin does not serve the interests of the peoples of the world, but makes them serve its own interests; that, with a treachery and hypocrisy without parallel, it makes use of the international working class as a mere pawn in its political intrigues, and that, on the pretext of fomenting world revolution, it consolidates its own totalitarian counter-revolution and prepares for world domination.⁸⁶

The reasons for Stalin's decision to send arms to the Spanish Republic, while maintaining Soviet membership of the Non-Intervention Committee, were the results of a desire to gain as much as possible from a complicated situation. Stalin

⁸⁵ For details of the purge in Spain, see, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War" pp.430-431, 455, 503, 777. Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", pp. 122-133. Fischer, "Russia's Road from Peace to War", pp.284-285.

⁸⁶ "Solidaridad Obrero", Paris, March 11th 1951, quoted by Bolloten, "The Grand Camouflage", p.144. See also, Schapiro, "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union", p.485. "Many illusions on the nature of Russian communist rule were shattered in the Spanish Civil War."

stood to make considerable gains in the propaganda sphere, to gain the support of Britain and France should they desire to make a stand against fascist aggression,⁸⁷ and if all else failed he perhaps hoped that a prolonged conflict in Spain might keep Hitler occupied in western Europe rather than on the borders of the USSR.⁸⁸

Once committed to such a policy, and finding that neither Britain nor France were prepared to take any strong measures, apart from the brief success at Nyon, Stalin could not afford to disengage the USSR from the Non-Intervention Committee. To have withdrawn from the Committee would have given the Fascist Powers the ideal opportunity of branding the Soviet Union as the wrecker of non-intervention and the excuse for further increasing their support of the Nationalists in the fight against Bolshevism. Thus the Soviet Union remained a member of the Committee from beginning to end, supporting any scheme which seemed likely to improve the lot of the Republic, and opposing, though never to the point of breakdown, those measures seeming to favour the Nationalists.

The considerable negotiating skill shown by Maisky served Stalin much better than either Ribbentrop⁸⁹ or Grandi served

⁸⁷ Cattell thinks that the secrecy surrounding Soviet aid to the Republic was due to a desire not to "alienate her potential partners, the Western democracies, and that the West should not lose faith in Russia as an ally because she failed to abide by the pact." Cattell, "Communism and the Spanish Civil War", p.75. This is an academic point, as London and Paris were never disposed to see Russia as an ally under any circumstances, and were fully aware that the USSR was sending assistance to the Republic - a fact which they found as irritating as Moscow's breaking of the Non-Intervention Agreement.

⁸⁸ See, A. Orlov, "The Secret History of Stalin's Crimes", (New York, 1953), pp.241-242. The German Government similarly hoped to tie down Britain and France by supporting Franco. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.III, No.701, p.803. Memorandum by the Head of Political Division IIIa, December 3rd 1938.

⁸⁹ Ribbentrop's deputy, Woermann, was more capable. No doubt Ribbentrop, "As a mere courtier, far from the capital Berlin, with its struggle for power and its cabals... probably feared for his position." See J.C.Fest, "The Face of the Third Reich" (London, 1970), pp.175-186.

their respective regimes. They may have succeeded in their ultimate aim of defeating the Spanish Republic, but failed to achieve the consistent propaganda influence which attended each of Maisky's diplomatic successes, however minor.

A second, and perhaps more important reason for not withdrawing from the Committee, was the fear that the Spanish problem would be settled by the four Powers, Britain, France, Germany and Italy, an alignment which continued Soviet presence on the Non-Intervention Committee would help to obstruct. This re-creation of the Four Power Pact of 1933, was a constant Soviet preoccupation, but after the Anschluss and the Munich Agreement⁹⁰ had, in the Soviet view, made it a reality, Soviet involvement in Spain, like its participation in the Non-Intervention Committee, faded away.⁹¹ As much as the Munich Agreement, the Spanish Civil War demonstrated that the Western democracies placed no value upon collective security. This did not so much produce a total volte-face in Soviet foreign policy, as a change in emphasis. Stalin maintained links with Germany through the annual economic talks, and there was at least one definite, though unsuccessful, Soviet political approach to the Germans in 1937.⁹²

The Spanish Civil War and the Non-Intervention Committee, formed the background against which Moscow viewed the Brussels Conference, the Anschluss, the Munich Agreement and the rejection of its offers of collective consultation. Soviet

⁹⁰ Chamberlain believed that the Spanish problem might also be solved by the four Munich Powers. See, Feiling. "The Life of Neville Chamberlain", p.376. Ciano, "Diaries 1937-8", pp.167-168.

⁹¹ See, Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", p.700.

⁹² For details of this Soviet approach, see, Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.432 and 453.

participation in the London Committee thus gave Stalin a means of testing the attitude of London and Paris towards the Fascist Powers. The role played by Soviet Conference Diplomacy in the Spanish conflict was a secondary one, when compared to Russian material aid to the Republic. However, whereas Soviet aid did not succeed, Moscow's activity in the Non-Intervention Committee ensured that the Soviet Union reaped rich propaganda rewards from its public stance, and was thus the only nation to emerge from the prolonged farce of Non-Intervention with any advantage,⁹³ however ill-deserved.

⁹³ Krivitsky concludes that, "All he (Stalin) got out of the adventure was a pile of Spanish gold." Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", p.134. For details of this transaction, see, *ibid.*, pp.99, 130-131. Thomas, "The Spanish Civil War", pp.418-419.

While the attention of the European Powers was concentrated upon events in Spain, the Japanese, on July 7th 1937, broke the uneasy truce in the Far East by invading North China, swiftly occupying Shanghai, Tientsin, Peking and other towns. In Moscow this attack was seen as the second stage in the Japanese conquest of China,¹ bringing the threat of large scale war to an area which affected the security of the Soviet Union far more directly than the Spanish conflict.

Since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, and the subsequent creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo, Soviet-Japanese relations had fluctuated between mutual hostile suspicion and virtual open warfare. Disputes over fishing rights, the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway and frequent border incidents, such as that on the Amur river², kept tension at a high level despite Soviet attempts at conciliation. In 1935, Japan had rejected a Soviet proposal for a non-aggression pact made after the final agreement on the sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway.³ As if to underline its aggressive intentions with regard to the Soviet Union, the Japanese Government signed the

¹ See, Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", pp.661-662.

² See, Pravda, July 2nd and 3rd 1937. Izvestia, July 4th 1937.

³ See, Ponomaryov, "History of Soviet Foreign Policy 1917-1945", p.335.

The new Japanese attack clearly threatened the stability of the Far East, where there existed not even a token system of collective security such as the USSR had been striving to create in Europe. The Western attitude to Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 did not augur well for any Soviet expectations of Western cooperation against Japan now that her aggression had once more become overt. Neither were the Anglo-Japanese talks in May 1937, an encouraging sign.⁵ The USSR had viewed with approval the Australian suggestion for a regional security pact in the Pacific which had been put forward at the British Empire Conference of May 1937,⁶ and despite all the indications to the contrary as far as Europe was concerned, the Soviet Government perhaps felt that for once, "England, America and France could not but react in a positive fashion to the now serious threat to their Far Eastern position implicit in Japan's

⁴ Moscow had accurate information of the secret clauses of the Pact. Article 1 stated: "Should one of the High Contracting States become the object of an unprovoked attack or threat of attack by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the other High Contracting State obligates itself to take no measures which would tend to ease the situation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Should the case described in paragraph 1 occur, the High Contracting States will immediately consult on what measures to take to safeguard their common interests."

DGFP, Series D, Vol.I, No.463, p.734. For Krivitsky's description of his part in securing this secret information, see, Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", pp.32-36. Richard Sorge's role is described in F.W.Deakin and G.R.Storry, "The Case of Richard Sorge", (London, 1966). pp.184-186.

⁵ "The Anglo-Japanese conversations do not affect the interests of Japan alone. By handing over North China to the Japanese, London in fact allows and encourages Tokyo to engage in large-scale military adventures on the borders of the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic. In that is hidden the secret object of the manoeuvres of London and Tokyo." Pravda, May 10th 1937. See also Pravda, May 20th 1937.

⁶ See, Izvestia, May 21st 1937.

new forward moves."⁷ The Soviet Press suggested that the vacillations of Britain and France in Europe had encouraged the Japanese in their actions, "They have drawn their conclusions from the behaviour of the West European democracies with regard to Spain."⁸ The new situation in China was felt to be crucial in assessing the attitude of the West with regard to the policy of collective security. In a long article in Izvestia, the situation was compared with that of 1931. Since then the Soviet Union had become much more a force to be reckoned with, and, the writer claimed, Chinese national self-awareness had grown. The question now was whether Western attitudes had changed:

Several years ago the British position effectively decided the problem in favour of Japan. Now a decisive moment has once more arrived, which makes it necessary for foreign governments, that of Britain especially, to define their position. The conflict in North China and the attitude of the Powers to it will be a very important factor in the international situation.⁹

Without waiting for the reactions of Britain or France the USSR took an important step in protecting Soviet Far Eastern interests by concluding a Soviet-Chinese non-aggression pact on August 21st 1937,¹⁰ which later led to Soviet military supplies being sent to China. This pact was taken by the Soviet Government as proof of its dedication to the policy of the indivisibility of peace, and that,

The Soviet Union is actively interested in the preservation of peace in all areas of international relations - in the West and in the East, in Europe and in Asia. As a result of this the USSR draws special attention to the far-eastern crisis, which is threatening general peace, and emphasises by the signing of the non-aggression pact, its friendly relations with China.¹¹

⁷ Moore, "Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1931-45", p.86.

⁸ Izvestia, July 16th 1937.

⁹ Izvestia, July 22nd 1937.

¹⁰ For the text of the Soviet-Chinese non-aggression pact, see "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya 1917-57", (Moscow, 1959), No.111, p.161.

¹¹ Izvestia, August 30th 1937. See also, Pravda, August 30th 1937.

The Chinese rather hopefully described the pact as "a beginning of collective security for the Pacific countries through mutual assurances of non-aggression."¹² The Japanese Government saw it as a 'conspiracy' and adopted the familiar position of all the aggressive states by styling itself a bulwark against international Communism, as it had done after the Soviet-Mongolian mutual-assistance pact of March 12th 1935.¹³

The Sino-Soviet non-aggression pact notwithstanding, the initial Soviet response to the Far Eastern crisis was, typically, cautious. On July 20th, Litvinov informed Chilston in Moscow that the USSR was not prepared to take any individual action and would only participate in collective measures, if at all.¹⁴ The general impression of the British Embassy in Moscow was that at almost any cost the USSR wished to avoid war, and that if any aid was sent to China it would be sent clandestinely.¹⁵ In conversations with the British, the Chinese were critical of the lack of Soviet support, but by late September the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs had informed R.G.Howe, the British Chargé in Nanking that the Soviet Government were now considering sending aid to China, although this would depend on the line taken by Britain.¹⁶

The probability of joint Anglo-Soviet action was shown to be extremely remote by the hostile minute of Malcolm MacDonald on a report from Tokyo containing the hint from the Soviet

¹² "Chinese Year Book, 1938-39", p.615, quoted by Moore "Soviet Far Eastern Policy, 1931-45", p.87.

¹³ See E.Snow, "Mr.Hirota's Third Point", Foreign Affairs, No.4, July 1936, p.599.

¹⁴ Chilston to Eden, July 20th, 1937. PRO, FO371/20950, F4316/9/10.

¹⁵ McKillop to Eden, July 30th 1937. PRO, FO371/20951, F4735/9/10.

¹⁶ Howe to Eden, September 29th 1937. PRO, FO371/20956, F7273/9/10.

charge that together the USSR and Britain could stop Japanese aggression.¹⁷ The Soviet Government, however, was aware of this reluctance, and began to supply a certain amount of aid to China¹⁸ even before the Brussels Conference had failed to agree on collective action.

On September 12th 1937, China appealed to the League of Nations. After a brief description of the Japanese aggression, the appeal urged the League to,

undertake immediate and effective measures to put a stop to the intolerable continuance of Japanese aggressive and atrocious activities in China and to uphold the sanctity of international treaties. It is also their hope that the United States of America, devoted as she is to the cause of peace and international justice, will associate herself with the actions of the League in the future, as in the past; and that other nations having interests in the Far East but nonmembers of the League will likewise contribute their share to the general efforts to check aggression and bring about peace in Eastern Asia.¹⁹

The League Council referred the Chinese appeal to the Advisory Committee on the Sino-Japanese conflict which had been set up on February 24th 1933. The Advisory Committee met on September 21st, with American participation (the USA had no voting rights), and decided to invite China, Japan²⁰ and Australia to take part. Delbos suggested to Harrison, the American representative, that it might be better to have the

¹⁷ Minute by MacDonald, July 28th 1937. PRO, F0371/20951, F4603/9/10. Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for the Dominions.

¹⁸ For evidence of Soviet aid to China, see, Gage to Eden, August 28th 1937. PRO, F0371/20954, F5819/9/10. B.E.F. Gage, Second secretary at the Embassy at Peking. Craigie to Eden, September 7th 1937. PRO, F0371/20955, F6240/9/10. Sir Robert Leslie Craigie, Ambassador in Tokyo. Howe to Eden, September 28th 1937. PRO, F0371/20956, F7248/9/10.

¹⁹ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, p. 16. Chinese press communiqué, September 12th 1937.

²⁰ Japan refused to participate. For the text of the refusal see, *ibid.*, p. 35. Germany, like Italy, had also declined its invitation from the League to be represented on the Advisory Committee. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol. 1, No. 488. p. 760.

Sino-Japanese conflict dealt with by a "Pacific Nyon".²¹ This suggestion bore no fruit, though it was decided that a small sub-committee²² should be created, as the Advisory Committee was too cumbersome. On September 27th, the Committee produced its first resolution which was proposed by Cranbourne,²³ seconded by Delbos and supported, among others, by Litvinov:

The Advisory Committee, taking into urgent consideration the aerial bombardment by Japanese aircraft of open towns in China, expresses its profound distress at the loss of life caused to innocent civilians, including great numbers of women and children, as a result of such bombardment, and declares that no excuse can be made for such acts which have aroused horror and indignation throughout the world, and solemnly condemns them.²⁴

The Committee concluded its work with the adoption of an anodyne resolution which avoided actually naming Japan as the aggressor. It expressed moral support for China and urged members of the League not to take measures which would increase China's difficulties, and to consider "how far they can individually extend aid to China."²⁵ On October 6th, the League Assembly adopted the Committee's report and in accordance with its recommendation, transferred the discussion of the Far Eastern crisis to a proposed conference of the signatories of the Washington Nine-Power Treaty. Invitations were also to be sent to other states with special interests in the Far East.

Litvinov, while approving the moral condemnation of Japan, had pointed out the League's previous failures to act:

Thus we have had four aggressions in the course of five years. We see how aggression, when it meets

²¹ See FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.28-29. The Minister in Switzerland (Harrison) to the Secretary of State, September 21st 1937.

²² The sub-committee was composed of representatives from, Australia, Belgium, the U.K., China, Ecuador, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Russia, New Zealand and the USA.

²³ Lord Cranbourne, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

²⁴ For the full text of the resolution see, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.38.

²⁵ See, *ibid.*, Japan 1931-41, Vol.1, pp.384-394.

He cited the withdrawal of the Spanish question from the League as an example of the result of attempts to cooperate with the aggressors, but contrasted this with two conferences.

one at Montreux and the other quite recently at Nyon - which successfully and rapidly did what was required of them, in spite of the absence of universality - that is to say, the absence of those states whose participation is usually regarded as the meaning of universality.²⁷

Litvinov was no doubt apprehensive that the Far Eastern crisis would be dealt with by a body including German, Italian or Japanese representatives. As two of these states had left the League, and Italy's relations with the League were not of the best,²⁸ he perhaps hoped that the question would be discussed at Geneva. This was probably the reason for Litvinov's comment that what could be done by Nine-Power Conference could be done by the League. Cranbourne had countered by referring, as indeed Litvinov himself had done earlier, to the Nyon Conference as an example of the successful application of special machinery to deal with a special case.²⁹

The attitude of the United States Government was to prove crucial to the organisation of any collective measures against Japan. Roosevelt's Chicago Speech of October 5th 1937,³⁰ had

²⁶ Degras, Vol.III, p.262. See also Izvestia, September 22nd 1937. Pravda on the same day urged the "collective repulse of the fascists by all the governments interested in peace.... Only in this way is it possible to check and even extinguish the flames of world war now being lighted by Germany, Italy and Japan."

²⁷ Degras, Vol.III, p.257.

²⁸ Italy in fact left the League in December 1937. Japan had left on March 28th 1933 and Germany on October 19th 1933.

²⁹ See, U.K.Delegation, Geneva, (Cranbourne), October 5th 1937. PRO, FO371/21014, F7444/6799/10. See also, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.54-58. The Minister in Switzerland (Harrison) to the Secretary of State, October 5th 1937. For a Soviet account of the events preceeding the calling of the Brussels Conference, see, M.S.Kapitsa, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya v 1931-1945 gg." (Moscow, 1956), pp.49-56.

³⁰ "World lawlessness is spreading. When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community." For the full text, see, FRUS, Japan, 1931-1941, Vol.1, p.379.

been welcomed by the USSR who realised the importance of the position adopted by the USA.³² However the speech proved to be no more than a flash in the pan, and without the cooperation of the USA, neither Britain nor France were prepared to take any action against Japan.³³ Eden emphasised this fact in his memoirs,³⁴ and his view is supported by British documentary material. An Admiralty memorandum of October 4th stated that, "H.M.G. would not be prepared to consider sanctions against Japan unless assured in advance of the fullest military support and collaboration of the USA."³⁵ Eden fully endorsed this attitude,³⁶ though he realised that the probability of positive American action in the Far East was very slim. In a telegram to Mallet, the British Charge in Washington, Eden stated that the conference would be faced with the choice of; deferring any action, in the hope that a change in the situation might occur; expressing moral condemnation of Japan without taking or promising any action; or embarking on positive action in the form either of active assistance to China or of economic pressures on Japan. The major problem was however to enlist US aid without "frightening" them into isolation.³⁷

Almost as if to ensure the failure of the Conference

³¹ See, Izvestia, October 8th 1937.

³² See, Kapitsa, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya v 1931-1945 gg." p.56.

³³ As Cadogan told Corbin, on September 28th 1937, "nothing could shake the apathy of the Americans whose attitude was the key to the problem." DDF, 2e Série, Vol.VI, No.499. Corbin to Delbos, September 28th 1937.

³⁴ See, Eden, pp.531-539. Eden also describes the differences in approach between Chamberlain and himself. See, also, Harvey "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40", pp.48-49, 59.

³⁵ Admiralty Memorandum, October 4th 1937. PRO, F0371/21014, F7372/6799/10.

³⁶ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions (37), October 13th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8000/6799/10. See also, Eden, pp.533-543.

³⁷ Eden to Mallet, October 18th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8013/6799/10. See also, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.90.

before it met, Eden desired Japanese participation at Brussels. The Japanese were, however, less eager, although in conversation with Eden in London, the Japanese Ambassador expressed hope for a rapprochement with Britain, or possible British mediation.³⁸ By October 20th, it was clear to the British Government that the USA was not prepared to take decisive action. Thus when the Conference assembled "the main line of the speeches should be to present the object of the Conference as appeasement."³⁹ Chamberlain was resolutely opposed to the imposition of economic sanctions on Japan⁴⁰ the only result of which, in his view, would be war. Unilateral action by Great Britain was considered impossible.⁴¹

Thus before the conference even began, British expectations of any success were virtually non-existent, as a memorandum by Cadogan on October 22nd, demonstrates:

In the absence of any representative of Japan, it is difficult to see exactly how the Brussels Conference can proceed....I confess that I do not see what the Conference can do beyond report back to the President of the Assembly that it sees no prospect at the moment of carrying out its task of conciliation and mediation.⁴²

Eden echoed this view some days later: "I am more and more in doubt as to what this conference can achieve."⁴³ France would not act without Britain, Britain would not act without the USA, and in addition felt that a Japanese presence at Brussels would

³⁸ Eden to Craigie, October 18th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8133/6799/10.

³⁹ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions (37), October 20th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8307/6799/10. These were Chamberlain's words.

⁴⁰ See, Eden, p.539. Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940" p.58.

⁴¹ See, Memorandum by Nicholls (Second Secretary at the F.O.). October 20th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8142/6799/10. This memorandum estimated that between them, the UK and the USA controlled, 60% of Japan's petroleum supplies, 48% pig iron, 47% scrap, 37.5% manganese, 75% nickel, 38% copper, 74% rubber, 58% tin and 54% of her lead requirements.

⁴² F.O. Memorandum by Cadogan, October 22nd 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8467/6799/10. Sir A. Cadogan, Deputy Under Secretary of State.

⁴³ Minute by Eden, October 26th 1937. PRO, F0371/21015, F8630/6799/16.

be the only chance of a successful outcome for the Conference. The Conference was thus clearly doomed some weeks before it even began.

The Soviet attitude to the proposed Conference was similarly, less than sanguine. Davies, the American Ambassador, reported that the Soviet press was in general pleased "that the Conference has been called by the League of Nations and that it was announced that other governments having immediate interests in the Far East would be invited to participate."⁴⁴ However, despite Litvinov's previous public references to the Montreux and Nyon Conferences, he told Davies that he was "definitely pessimistic as to any substantial accomplishment of a realistic character at Brussels." Litvinov was also aware of the disappointment of the British Foreign Office at the Japanese refusal either to attend the Conference or to accept British mediation. Italy's presence at Brussels, he claimed, represented, if not explicitly, a Japanese foothold at the Conference.⁴⁵ Russia and Germany were not sent invitations to Brussels until Japan had communicated her refusal to the Belgian

⁴⁴ FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.88. The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Davies) to the Secretary of State, October 18th 1937.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.129-131. The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Davies) to the Secretary of State, October 31st 1937. See, *ibid.*, pp.119-131. See also, J.E.Davies, "Mission to Moscow" (London, 1942) p.161. The American delegate to the Brussels Conference, Norman Davis, later confirmed Litvinov's apprehensions concerning the Italian role at Brussels, Italy is openly playing Japan's game though by no means effectively." FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.157. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 6th 1937. Hirota, the Japanese Foreign Minister, informed Dirksen that the Italian Ambassador in Tokyo had told him "that Italy would represent and explain the Japanese standpoint" at Brussels. DGFP, Series D, Vol.1, No.501, p.769. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, October 21st 1937.

Government, lest Japan use their invitations as a pretext.⁴⁶
This delay gave the US Embassy in Moscow "the definite impression that the Soviet Union was considerably perturbed at not having been invited to attend the initial sessions of the Conference..."⁴⁷

Although the Soviet Government accepted its invitation to Brussels, a long Article by 'Vigilis' in the Izvestia of October 28th 1937, expressed doubts about the forthcoming Conference, and attacked the lack of resolution in the West:

The trouble is that the Brussels Conference is apparently being called in order to, above all, invite the aggressors to decide the means of combatting aggression. It is not improbable that at Brussels something similar to the London Committee for non-intervention in Spanish affairs will be created... The work of the London Committee and the Geneva deliberations have shown that the governments of these countries (the Western democracies) are frightened not only of the cries of the aggressors but of their own shadows... At the present there is no basis for expecting that the Brussels variant will prove to be better than the London one, serving only the aims of the aggressors.⁴⁸

Germany chose to decline the invitation of the Belgian Government, stating that the German Government doubted the chances of success at Brussels and adding that in any case, Germany had not been a party to the original Nine Power Treaty.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See, Clive to Eden, October 25th 1937. PRO, FO371/21015, F8461/6799/10. Sir Robert Clive, Ambassador in Brussels. For the text of the Japanese refusal, see, FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 112-113.

⁴⁷ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 100-101. The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Davies) to the Secretary of State, October 22nd 1937.

⁴⁸ Izvestia, October 28th 1937. The Pravda of the same date stated that, "The composition of the Brussels Conference, even in the case of Japan's absence, makes it impossible in advance for the Conference to reach any positive decisions. The basis for activity in these circumstances can result only in empty chatter, under cover of which the Japanese militarists will continue their criminal war against the Chinese people".

⁴⁹ DGFP, Series D, Vol. I, No. 494, p. 764. Memorandum, October 13th 1937. See Ibid., No. 505, p. 772. The German Government found itself in something of a dilemma in the Far East, where it had both close military links with the Chinese and was a co-member of the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan. Germany began by urging moderation on Japan, but by late 1938 she was following a basically pro-Japanese line. Japan had indicated that she "would be pleased" if Germany would refuse to attend the Brussels Conference. See also, Ibid., Nos. 472 and 507.

The question of German participation in the Conference did not end with Berlin's refusal. Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Foreign Minister, told Davis on November 6th, that he would have the Belgian Ambassador informally sound out the views of the German Government regarding any change of attitude towards the Conference.⁵⁰ This approach came to nothing.

Before the Conference opened, the Belgian Government expressed its apprehension "at the prospect of opening a conference in Brussels...without any intimation as to its agenda or terms of reference."⁵¹ The next day, October 23rd, the American Ambassador in Belgium, Gibson, reported:

there is a certain amount of panic in Belgian official circles due to the fact that a Conference is about to meet, wherein Belgium will inevitably have to play a rather conspicuous role and that up to now they have not been consulted or informed as to what it is contemplated the Conference should seek to accomplish.

Gibson added that the Belgian Government expected the Conference to fail, and that it was apprehensive about the consequences of such a failure to Belgian internal stability and external security.⁵² The combination of a Belgian Cabinet crisis and two days of public holidays meant that the opening date of the

⁵⁰ Sumner Welles, US Under Secretary of State, had previously told Dieckhoff, the German Ambassador in Washington, that "the American Government was very anxious for Germany to participate" in the Brussels Conference. DGFP, Series D, Vol.I, No.502, p.770. Dieckhoff to the Foreign Ministry, October 21st 1937. Britain had informed the US Government on October 20th that "It seems to His Majesty's Government impossible to exclude either Russia or Germany from the Conference." FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, The British Embassy to the Department of State, October 20th 1937, p.95.

⁵¹ FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.107. The Ambassador in Belgium (Gibson) to the Secretary of State, October 22nd 1937.

⁵² Ibid., p.107. The Ambassador in Belgium (Gibson) to the Secretary of State, October 23rd 1937. See also, Clive to Eden, October 25th 1937. PRO, FO371/21015, F8450/6799/10.

Conference was changed from October 30th to November 3rd.⁵³

When the Brussels Conference opened, "...the prospect of any vigorous concerted action by the Powers had again faded away to vanishing point",⁵⁴ and from the very first the emphasis was on conciliation and mediation. The welcoming speech of the President of the Conference, Monsieur Spaak, set the tone:

"What we want is to accomplish a work of conciliation and peace without bias and without passion, taking into account all the legitimate interests which are present."⁵⁵ Litvinov, as head of the Soviet delegation chose to strike a somewhat more abrasive note by warning the Conference of the "dangerous ruts and pitfalls" which lay in the path of such a gathering. He stated that the Soviet Union's aim was "not only the creation of peace in the Far East, but of a just peace, and a peace which would not release, but would bind the hands of aggressors in the future and in other parts of the world."⁵⁶ Litvinov pointed out that despite the moral value of international conferences they were,

sometimes inclined - particularly in the event of a protracted existence - to forget their direct purpose and the technical part they have to play, and begin to live their own life, with their own peculiar interests. They begin to concern themselves principally with the maintenance of their own existence, with the procuring of moral satisfaction for those who have instigated such conferences, and with their own superficial successes, which do not always coincide with successes

⁵³ See, FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, p. 109. The Ambassador in Belgium (Gibson) to the Secretary of State, October 26th 1937. Unfortunately the published Belgian diplomatic documents for this period contain only material related to the problems of Belgian external security. Ch. De Visscher et F. Vanlangenhove, "Documents Diplomatiques Belges 1920-40, Tome IV, Période 1936-37", (Bruxelles, 1965).

⁵⁴ G.E. Hubbard, "The Far East", Survey 1937, Vol. 1, p. 286. The nations represented at Brussels were, Britain, France, the USA, China, Italy, South Africa, Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, Denmark, India, Mexico, Norway, New Zealand, Portugal, Sweden and the USSR.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 287.

⁵⁶ Ivashin, "Ocherki istorii vneshnei politiki SSSR", p. 272.

for the cause on account of which the Conferences
were brought into existence.⁵⁷

These words, a clear reference to the Non-Intervention Committee in London, and an indication of Litvinov's expectations of the Brussels Conference, were not heeded. The Conference decided to appoint a smaller committee⁵⁸ to study the two replies Japan had sent, and then to reply on behalf of the Conference and attempt to establish a point of contact between China and Japan, a vain hope in view of the intractability already demonstrated by the latter.⁵⁹

Craigie reported a Japanese suggestion⁶⁰ similar to that made by the Italian representative at Brussels,⁶¹ that a more favourable Japanese response might be produced if the Soviet Union were not to be a member of the proposed committee. These proposals seem to have had some effect on the note sent by the Conference to the Japanese Government in response to the Japanese comment that too many Powers were present at Brussels. The Conference said it would be,

glad to know whether the Imperial Government would be disposed to depute a representative or representatives to exchange views with representatives of a small number of Powers chosen for that purpose. Such an exchange of

⁵⁷ U.K. Delegation, Brussels, Draft notes of Second Plenary Session of Brussels Conference, November 3rd 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9133/6799/10. For Norman Davis's opening speech, see, FRUS, Japan 1931-41, Vol. 1, pp. 404-408.

⁵⁸ See, FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, p. 156. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 4th 1937. Davis reported that the French and British were in favour of "a small subcommittee which will probably be set up by Conference to deal with Japan and China should also inquire of Germany, whether she would be willing to cooperate in its work. This would avoid the possibility of a second rejection by Germany of an invitation from the Conference and yet might secure her cooperation where it would be useful."

⁵⁹ Clive, Brussels, November 4th 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9071/6799/10. Eden headed the British delegation in Brussels. He returned to London on November 5th.

⁶⁰ Craigie to Eden, November 6th 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9147/6799/10.

⁶¹ Clive to Eden, November 6th 1937, PRO, F0371/21016, F9156/6799/10.

views would take place within the framework of the Nine Power Treaty and in conformity with the provisions of that treaty. Its aims would be to throw further light on the various points referred to above and to facilitate a settlement of the conflict. Regretting the continuation of hostilities, being firmly convinced that a peaceful settlement is alone capable of insuring a lasting and constructive solution of the present conflict, and having confidence in the efficacy of methods of conciliation, the representatives of the states met at Brussels earnestly desire that such a settlement may be achieved.⁶²

Even the creation of this committee proved to be an insoluble task. On November 4th, "The British and American delegates agreed that a sub-committee composed of the United Kingdom, the United States and Belgium would be theoretically desirable." However, as Davis reported, "both France and Italy seemed to feel that they should be represented."⁶³ On November 6th, Delbos insisted on French participation in any committee, but suggested that perhaps the only way to salvage anything from the Conference would be for France, Britain and the USA to act outside the Conference perhaps under the leadership of the American President.⁶⁴ Flattering though this idea may have been, Davis was irritated by the French insistence on membership of the proposed committee: "To add to our difficulties if France is chosen Italy insists on being included and if Italy is selected Soviet Russia demands membership."⁶⁵ Davis

⁶² U.K. Delegation, Brussels, November 8th 1937. PRO, FO371/21016, F9273/6799/10.

⁶³ FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.157. Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 4th 1937.

⁶⁴ See Ibid., pp.163-164. Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 7th 1937.

⁶⁵ FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.164-165. Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 7th 1937. Davis did not want Italian participation any more than that of the USSR, yet he was reluctant to agree to a committee composed only of France, Britain and the USA as this would look "too much like a revival of the old World War lineup." For further French insistence on their membership in the Committee, see, *ibid.*, pp.168, 174.

and MacDonald subsequently agreed⁶⁶ that the Soviet Union should not be a member of any larger or smaller sub-committee, and that they would use the excuse of Russia's absence from the original Nine-Power Treaty.⁶⁷

Litvinov clearly saw the course that the Conference was beginning to take, and that the policy of collective security with which he was so personally identified, was doomed to suffer another failure. Norman Davis was also somewhat surprised at the degree of defeatism evident from the very opening of the Conference.⁶⁸ MacDonald reported a conversation between Davis and Litvinov on November 8th:

Litvinov had spoken to him frankly, saying that he had been in control of Russian foreign policy for the last two or three years and that he was afraid it had proved a failure. Russia had come into the League of Nations because she believed in collective action, but at the time of the Abyssinian dispute collective action had failed. Subsequently Russia had worked loyally with most of the other parties to the non-intervention policy in Spain, but that a second effort at collective action seemed to be failing. He had been somewhat reluctant to accept the invitation to the Brussels Conference, but had accepted because he wished to make a last effort at cooperation in a great collective policy, especially in view of the fact that the United States would be a party to the Conference.

Referring more specifically to the question of Soviet membership of the Committee, Litvinov complained that, "Russia could not consent to be kept waiting in an ante-room whilst the rest of the Conference got on with the work."⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Britain and the USA decided to coordinate their policies at Brussels so that neither would be pushed to the fore. See, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.145-147. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 2nd 1937. See also, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-40" pp.54-55.

⁶⁷ Clive to Eden, November 8th 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9273/6799/10.

⁶⁸ FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.156. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 4th 1937.

⁶⁹ Clive to Eden, November 8th 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9272/6799/10. Eden had admitted to the heads of the Dominion delegations that Russia did have very considerable interests in the Far East, "However the inclusion of Russia (in the proposed Committee) would certainly have a very bad effect on Japan." UK Delegation, Brussels, November 2nd 1937. PRO, F0371/21016, F9085/6799/10.

In a conversation with Eden on November 9th, Litvinov said that he was returning to Moscow and would be leaving Potemkin in charge. He made it clear to Eden that he was disappointed at the course of events at Brussels. He pointed out once more, that for Italy to be a member of the committee while the USSR was excluded, was intolerable, both because of Russia's greater Far Eastern interests and the fact that Italy's membership of the Anti-Comintern Pact⁷⁰ made it obvious that she was not impartial. The USSR, he said, was prepared to participate in any genuine international action against aggression. Eden countered rather weakly that although Anglo-Soviet relations did not approach the cordiality of those between France and Great Britain, they "surely could still be regarded as very fairly satisfactory." Litvinov replied that Britain had nothing to fear from Russia, and that the trouble was that the Rome-Berlin Axis functioned better than Anglo-French cooperation.⁷¹

Although Litvinov had not planned to remain in Brussels for the entire Conference,⁷² his departure seems to indicate the end of Soviet hopes for a successful outcome, and thus can be taken as an important date in Moscow's disillusionment with the Western democracies. After a further Japanese

⁷⁰ Italy joined the Anti-Comintern Pact on November 6th 1937, an action which Moscow regarded as being inconsistent with article 4 of the Soviet-Italian treaty of friendship of 1933. See, DVP, Vol.XVI, No.144, p.285. Degras, Vol.III, p.265.

⁷¹ Clive, Brussels, November 9th 1937. PRO, FO371/21017, F9384/6799/10.

⁷² See, Davies, "Mission to Moscow", p.161.

refusal to participate,⁷³ the Conference continued to indulge in fruitless discussions of the type associated with the Non-Intervention Committee in London. The hope that China and Japan could be induced to negotiate directly with each other was made still more remote by Generalissimo Chiang-Kai-Shek's refusal to countenance any such contacts.⁷⁴

One curious aspect arising from the Conference is the reference in "Istoriya diplomatii" and "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii" to attempts by British and American diplomats to induce the Soviet Union to attack Japan and thus shorten the war in China.⁷⁵ Andrew Rothstein⁷⁶ expands this somewhat, by claiming that the USA and Great Britain said they would carry out a 'naval demonstration' in the Far East, while the USSR was to mobilize its forces on the Manchurian border and send aircraft over Tokyo.⁷⁷ This 'proposal' was rejected by the USSR:

The Soviet delegation exposed the Western Power's attempt at collusion at the expense of China and the USSR and foiled the manoeuvres of imperialist diplomacy, which counted on the provocation of a Soviet-Japanese war.⁷⁸

⁷³ Eden, Delbos and Davis all expected the Japanese to send another refusal. See, FRUS, 1937. Vol.IV, pp.177-178. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 11th 1937. In a conversation with Vansittart, the Japanese Ambassador reaffirmed Japan's refusal and stated that his Government would accept no mediation arising out of the Brussels Conference. Record of a conversation between Vansittart and the Japanese Ambassador, November 11th 1937. PRO FO371/21017, F9530/6799/10. Despite this Eden authorised the sending of telegrams to Tokyo and Washington to explore the possibility of joint UK-American mediation. Clive, Brussels, November 15th 1937. PRO, FO371/21017, F9621/6799/10.

⁷⁴ See, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.166-167. The Ambassador in China (Johnson) to the Secretary of State, November 8th 1937.

⁷⁵ See, Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.672. Trukhanovsky, "Istoriya mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR, 1917-1939", p.344.

⁷⁶ Andrew Rothstein was TASS correspondent in Geneva.

⁷⁷ A. Rothstein, "The Munich Conspiracy", (London, 1958), p.36.

⁷⁸ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.672.

The only trace of this 'proposal' in British documentary sources is to be found in a Foreign Office Minute of December 20th 1937. Chang Ping-chun, a Chinese official had returned from Moscow with the following information to the effect that the Soviet Union,

would give the Chinese assistance if other Powers also took action. Such action need not be joint or cooperative, but if Britain, America or France or any of them, staged, for example, a naval demonstration, Russia would simultaneously stage an air demonstration.⁷⁹

Thus the idea seems to have been of Soviet origin, or possibly of Chinese manufacture.⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, nothing came of the suggestion. The minute on this document can be taken as representing the general view of the British Government:

Russia will always try to fish in troubled waters and will be a bad and faithless ally. We ought to be just as obdurate against "joint" action with Russia as the Americans are in our case (though I hope for different reasons) but "parallel" action might be welcomed.⁸¹

The Conference made virtually no further progress. The sixth plenary session was devoted almost entirely to obituaries to the late Ramsay MacDonald, rather than to the events in the Far East. At the next plenary meeting Wellington Koo called for the imposition of economic sanctions against Japan and

⁷⁹ F.O. Minute by Pratt, December 20th 1937. PRO, FO371/20961, F11289/9/10. Sir J.Pratt, Acting Counsellor at the Foreign Office.

⁸⁰ Wellington Koo, the Chinese delegate at Brussels, suggested to Davis on November 17th, that the Conference should take some steps to aid China, short of the imposition of sanctions, or should send military supplies. In addition he proposed "some sort of a military demonstration on the part of the Soviet Union and a naval demonstration on the part of other Powers." FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, p.200. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 17th 1937.

⁸¹ Minute by J.Thyne Henderson, December 20th 1937. PRO,FO371/20961, F11289/9/10. Henderson was a First Secretary at the Foreign Office.

the sending of assistance to China. He also complained that, "After ten days of effort the Conference finds itself back in the position where it started."⁸³ At the same session Potemkin also noted the failure of the Conference to achieve anything of value, and re-stated the position of his Government:

There is, however, no reason for abandoning the hope that peace may be restored. The Soviet delegation is firmly convinced of the possibility of settling the conflict on the basis of equity, respect for treaties signed, and the principle of national sovereignty.

Faithful to her policy of peace, the Soviet Union is always ready to give her support to any initiative inspired by a desire to maintain peace and to prevent resort to war becoming a method for the settlement of international disputes. That is why the Soviet Government, which is particularly concerned in the maintenance of peace in the Far East, has taken part in the Brussels Conference. We are compelled to note with regret that all the efforts made by the Conference to terminate hostilities in the Far East by methods of mediation and conciliation have failed.

This object, however, cannot be achieved unless the joint and effective efforts of the powers concerned in the maintenance of peace in the Pacific are directed to that end. Any concrete initiative taken on this basis will have the support of the Soviet Union.⁸⁴

The Conference went into recess between November 15th and 22nd, still without having agreed upon the formation of the sub-committee.⁸⁵ During this pause, on November 17th, Potemkin

⁸² The Soviet delegation was the only one which "gave diplomatic support to the Chinese delegation, defending the interests of the Chinese people," by supporting the Chinese proposal for sanctions against Japan. Kapitsa, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya v 1931-1945 gg.", p.57. The Soviet Union did not in fact apply any specific economic sanctions against Japan, but commercial and economic relations between the two countries were by 1938 at an almost insignificant level. See, H.Wei, "China and Soviet Russia", (New York, 1956), p.137.

⁸³ UK Delegation, Brussels, Seventh Plenary Meeting, November 13th 1937. PRO, FO371/21017, F9625/6799/10.

⁸⁴ Ibid. See also, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya 1917-57", No.115, p.167.

⁸⁵ "The consensus of opinion now is that since it is not possible to agree upon a small working committee it would be better to have no committee at all. If there were to be a large committee it would probably have to include all the original signatories including Italy and possibly Russia and there is a very strong opposition here to either or both of them." FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.185-186. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 14th 1937.

what action would be taken when the Conference reconvened:

He was very insistent in urging us to recommend concrete measures against Japan as his Government was convinced that nothing (else) would stop the conflict. He reiterated that Soviet Russia would join in anything the British and ourselves might be prepared to do; that she did not wish to act alone but if there is to be no common action and she is left to act alone she would not feel able to do more than continue to facilitate "in a discreet way" the shipments overland of arms and munitions to China.⁸⁶

Davis pointed out, as he had repeatedly throughout the Conference, that the United States was not prepared to take any concrete measures to deter Japan.⁸⁷

On November 21st, Izvestia noted that Lord Cranbourne's replacement of Eden and de Tessen's replacement of Delbos was taken, in Conference circles "as a sign of preparations for the liquidation of the Conference." The article predicted that in all probability the ending of the Conference "would be in the form of the Conference's adoption of a general resolution with no obligations."⁸⁸ In this case Izvestia's prediction proved correct. The Conference ended on November 24th, with a report of its work and the adoption of a resolution

⁸⁶ FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp. 198-199. The Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis) to the Secretary of State, November 17th 1937. Cranbourne reported that Wellington Koo and Quo Tai Chi had expressed a desire for the representatives of interested nations to meet unofficially and privately to discuss aid to China. Cranbourne commented; "This proposal had already been made to me in almost identical terms the day before by M. Rubinin, the Soviet Representative, and it was clear that it was the result of conversations between the two Delegations." F.O. Minute by Cranbourne, November 25th, 1937. PRO, FO371/21018, F10093/6799/10.

⁸⁷ Ibid. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 174, 176, 184, 212-213, 215.

⁸⁸ Izvestia, November 21st 1937. Izvestia noted that there was no apparent probability of the creation of another version of the "Non-Intervention Committee", as neither the Chinese nor the Americans wanted this.

deprecating the use of force. This resolution was, if anything weaker than the report of the League Advisory Committee of October 5th:

In order to allow time for participating governments to exchange views and further explore all peaceful methods by which a just settlement of the dispute may be attained consistently with the principles of the Nine Power Treaty and in conformity with the objectives of that treaty the Conference deems it advisable temporarily to suspend its sittings. The conflict in the Far East remains however, a matter of concern to all the powers assembled at Brussels - by virtue of commitments in the Nine Power Treaty or of special interest in the Far East - and especially to those most immediately and directly affected by conditions and events in the Far East...

The Conference will be called together again whenever its chairman or any two of its members shall have reported that they consider that its deliberations can be advantageously resumed.⁸⁹

The Conference then adjourned 'sine die'. Spaak's closing speech could not camouflage the transparent failure of the Conference:

Dr. Wellington Koo has said that his delegation is somewhat disappointed with the results of this Conference. I am sure that feeling of disappointment will be shared by many others of us - disappointment that the Conference has not succeeded in ensuring peace in the Far East; but although we are disappointed, we are not and must not be discouraged.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ U.K. Delegation, Brussels, Tenth Plenary Meeting (Final), November 24th 1937. PRO, FO371/21018, F10045/6799/10. For the full text of the final resolution of the Conference, see Appendix No.5.

⁹⁰ Ibid. At a Cabinet meeting on November 17th, Eden had outlined the three alternatives facing the Conference. It could conclude by adopting a tepid resolution expressing regret at Japan's lack of cooperation and appointing a sub-committee to study the situation. It could adopt a tepid resolution and appoint the UK and USA as a committee to press for conciliation. Or it could express disapproval of Japan's actions, refuse recognition of her conquests and refuse to grant her credits. Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, November 17th 1937. PRO, FO371/21017, F9711/6799/10. The Americans did not want the question to be referred back to Geneva. They also felt it was important not to admit the failure of the Conference. See, FRUS, 1937, Vol. IV, pp 180-181. The Secretary of State to the Chairman of the American Delegation (Davis), November 12th 1937.

In Soviet eyes, the Western nations had once again proved themselves to be irresolute in the face of aggression. Even the British Cabinet recognized that the results of the Conference were "inglorious", though some satisfaction was derived from the fact that relations with the USA and the Dominions were cordial, and that a door was at least open for a future Anglo-American initiative.⁹¹ But as Eden states, "The contrast with Nyon could scarcely have been more marked."⁹²

The conclusions drawn by the Soviet Government from the Brussels Conference are not difficult to imagine. The standard work on Soviet diplomacy predictably points out that, "The Conference showed the reluctance of the western powers to take any sort of serious action against Japanese aggression in China."⁹³ The contemporary Soviet press maintained its consistent criticism of the policies of the democracies, that of Great Britain in particular.⁹⁴ Though the USSR was invited to participate in the Brussels Conference, the Soviet delegation had been largely ignored by the other delegations, especially those of Britain and the USA who had endeavoured to keep Russia out of the proposed sub-committee. Litvinov, who had never been optimistic about the chances of success at Brussels, accurately assessed the probable attitudes of Britain and

⁹¹ See, CAB23/A90, November 24th 1937. See also, FRUS, 1937, Vol.IV, pp.219-221 for Davis's views on the possibility of Anglo-American mediation, and *ibid.*, pp.228-230 for British attempts to persuade Davis to visit London for talks on the subject.

⁹² Eden, p.540. The Italian newspaper, 'Popolo d'Italia' noted with satisfaction that, "The first intervention of America in a European conference for collective action, regarding which so many hopes had been raised by the Chicago speech, had a very unhappy epilogue." Perth to Eden, December 3rd 1937. Summary of article in "Popolo d'Italia" of December 1st 1937. PRO,FO371/21018, F10526/6799/10. Earl of Perth, British Ambassador in Italy.

⁹³ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii" Vol.III, p.673.

⁹⁴ See for example, Izvestia, November 24th, December 18th and 22nd 1937.

France before the opening of the Conference:

the British and French at Geneva had hidden behind the United States inasmuch as they held that at present they could do nothing unless they had the assurance of the active participation of the United States, and that he suspected that in their representations to the United States they were hiding behind an alleged insecurity as to what the attitude of the Soviet Union would be.⁹⁵

However, Litvinov had over-estimated the concern of Britain and France to know the attitude of the Soviet Union. The British and French had demonstrated at Brussels that they would not act without the USA, but the attitude of the USSR was simply not seen as being of any great importance, despite, or perhaps even because of, the repeated Soviet assurances that the Soviet Union was seriously interested in the cessation of hostilities and collective action.

If the London Non-Intervention Committee had not provided evidence enough of British and French reluctance to countenance collective measures against the aggressors in Europe, then their attitude throughout the Brussels Conference must have been almost conclusive. Britain, France and the USA had not only rejected collective action in concert with the Soviet Union, which had been treated with less than openness at Brussels, but had not taken measures among themselves to protect their own strategic and economic interests. A further cause of disquiet in Moscow was Halifax's visit to Berlin to discuss, among other topics, the Sudeten question with Hitler. This visit took place from November 17th to 21st,⁹⁶ while the Brussels Conference was in

⁹⁵ Davies "Mission to Moscow", p.165.

⁹⁶ For Halifax's account of his visit, see, Halifax, "Fulness of Days", pp.183-190. Halifax saw the visit as being harmless in itself and seems not to have been aware of the effects of such a visit at such a moment. Eden was not in fact opposed to the visit. See, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1937-1940", p.60.

session. Pravda commented that the visit made it "already apparent that the present policy of the English rulers is contrary to the interests of peace."⁹⁷ This approach to Germany was no doubt seen by the Narkomindel as consistent with British attempts to induce Japan to change its attitude to the Brussels Conference, in spite of all indications to the contrary.⁹⁸

Set against the background of the ailing Non-Intervention Committee, the Brussels Conference marked another decisive failure for Litvinov's policy of collective security. None of the aims with which the USSR had gone to Brussels had been achieved: "The Soviet Union went to the Conference for the protection of the interests of the Chinese people and to vindicate the principle of the struggle for collective security."⁹⁹ The Conference had fallen into all the pitfalls against which Litvinov had warned in his opening speech and it was now hardly possible to doubt that the Western Powers preferred either inaction, or to negotiate separately with the aggressors, rather than to take part in any collective measures, with or without the Soviet Union. Brussels, in fact, represented a considerable setback for Soviet Conference Diplomacy. The USSR had played a relatively minor part in the Nyon Conference, but had at least been associated with Britain and France in a

⁹⁷ Pravda, November 27th 1937.

⁹⁸ It was not entirely surprising that Moscow viewed British inaction in the face of extreme Japanese provocation with suspicion. The British Ambassador to China had been wounded in August and British ships had been fired upon by the Japanese in December, yet apologies for these incidents were only extracted from the Japanese Government with difficulty, while Britain at the same time had been hoping for Japan's participation at Brussels. See, Eden, pp.533-534, 541-542. For the Soviet interpretation see, Izvestia, September 4th 1937.

⁹⁹ E.M.Zhukov, ed., "Mezhdunarodnie otnoshenii na Dalnem Vostoke 1840-1949", (Moscow, 1956), p.486.

successful international conference. At Brussels the Soviet Union had been isolated and the Conference had been a total failure.

After Brussels, the Soviet Union was to participate in no further international conferences before the outbreak of war, and although Litvinov called for such conferences on several later occasions, these calls elicited no response from the Western Powers. Coming as it did, little more than a month after the Nyon Conference which, whatever its subsequent failings, had at least been an effective demonstration of the possibilities of collective action (albeit without overmuch dependence on the Soviet Union), the Brussels Conference¹⁰⁰ must have appeared to the Soviet Government as an almost deliberate capitulation to Japanese aggression. That western indecisiveness inevitably gave Japan a free hand in the Far East, an area where Soviet-Japanese border clashes had already occurred and seemed increasingly probable, increased Soviet suspicions that Britain, America and France were not averse to a major Soviet-Japanese conflict, and might even be encouraging such a confrontation.

Henceforth the Soviet Union conducted its Far Eastern policy by relying upon its own resources, maintaining in so far as was possible, formally correct relations with Japan, while supplying arms to the Chinese.¹⁰¹ The Red Army also decisively defeated the Japanese in the Lake Khasan region of

¹⁰⁰ According to one American writer the Conference represented, "The last good chance to work out a stable settlement between China and Japan." H. Feis, "The Road to Pearl Harbour", (Princeton, 1950), p.16.

¹⁰¹ For a Soviet account of Russian aid to China, see, Kapitsa, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya v 1931-1945 gg." pp.62-73.

Gol River area of the Mongolian People's Republic, in large scale actions lasting from May to August 1939.¹⁰³

The Soviet Government's decision to protect its own Far Eastern interests and the independence of Soviet policy towards Spain, indicated that however frequent its calls for collective action, the USSR was not prepared to allow western hesitancy and mistrust to stand in the way of the implementation of those policies serving the interests of the Soviet Union. It is more than possible that the failure of the Brussels Conference gave weight to the views of those in the NKID and Stalin's immediate circle who saw an alliance with Nazi Germany as a potentially more profitable alignment than Litvinov's now further discredited policy of collective security. But as long as the clandestine approaches to Germany bore no fruit, Litvinov retained his position as Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and continued to make pronouncements in the familiar vein in order to keep open the Western option. As the events of the next year were to reveal, this proved a particularly forlorn hope.

¹⁰² For details of this action see, Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.492-499. Izvestia, August 2nd-9th, 1938.

¹⁰³ See, M.Novikov, "Pobeda na Khalkhin-Gole" (Moscow,1971). Novikov suggests that the Munich Agreement of September 1938 encouraged the Japanese to "continue the provocation on the borders of the Soviet Far East". p.22. For an account of the battle see, Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.532-537. See also, Kapitsa, "Sovetsko-Kitaiskie otnosheniya v 1931-1945 gg.", pp.86-91.

The period between the failure of the Brussels Conference and the German annexation of Austria on March 12th 1938, was one of continued deterioration in the international situation. The Sino-Japanese war was continuing unabated, as was the conflict in Spain. In London the Non-Intervention Committee continued its meaningless discussions. German designs on Central Europe were becoming more menacing, while Britain and France seemed increasingly reluctant to take any steps to oppose the aggressive Powers.¹

Whatever Moscow's secret apprehensions and actions, the Soviet press maintained the public stance of support for the League of Nations and the policy of collective security. Despite the setbacks sustained by this policy the Soviet press gave the impression of concern at the state of international affairs, and even some hope that all was not lost. An Izvestia article of January 26th 1938, commented upon the one hundredth session of the League Council with these sentiments; "A League without aggressors, a League of peace-loving nations, without doubt could act energetically decisively and authoritatively." The article referred to the Montreux and Nyon Conferences as examples of successful collective action, and emphasised the continued Russian support of such efforts: "The Soviet Union supports the League of Nations insofar as it is a substantial element in the present 'peace potential', and insofar as the League of Nations is able to serve as an obstacle in the paths

¹ See, Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.712.

of the instigators of war."²

These words were virtually identical with those used by Stalin on December 25th 1933, in his interview with Duranty.³ Yet the international situation had, in the succeeding four years, changed to an extent which makes it difficult to believe that the Soviet Government, never renowned for its credulity, could seriously consider that Britain and France would abandon the policy of appeasement.

Eden's resignation was seen as a sign of a further weakening in the British attitude.⁴ A series of articles in Izvestia criticized British policy,⁵ contrasting in one instance, the "manoeuvres of the bourgeois politicians" with the attitude of the Soviet public which noted "the mistakes and weaknesses of bourgeois diplomacy, especially today when the entire Soviet people are celebrating with the greatest enthusiasm the twentieth anniversary of its heroic and invincible Red Army."⁶ This mention of the Red Army, and the implication that the USSR could rely on its own resources in the event of a war, was to become an increasingly frequent feature of Soviet public statements.

Even a close study of the Soviet press does not always make it possible to accurately chart potential policy changes from actual articles, but the public emphasis on the continuity of the Russian approach to the international situation is undeniable and this did not vary until the conclusion of the

² Izvestia, January 26th 1938.

³ See below, pp.81-82.

⁴ See Izvestia, February 21st and 22nd, 1938. For the implications of Eden's resignation on British policy see, M. Gilbert and R. Gott, "The Appeasers", (London, 1963), pp.85-87.

⁵ See Izvestia, February 25th and 26th 1938.

⁶ Izvestia, February 24th 1938. See also, Pravda, February 14th 1938.

Throughout February 1938, and up to the Anschluss itself, wide press coverage was given to developments in Germany and Austria. The Anglo-French attitude of complacency in the face of what Moscow saw as the inevitable German annexation of Austria, was consistently attacked.⁷ In contrast, Chamberlain made it clear in the House of Commons on February 21st 1938, that he regarded the Soviet Union as a factor of no great importance in European affairs:

The peace of Europe must depend on the attitude of the four major Powers - Germany, Italy, France and ourselves...Surely it cannot be disputed that these four Powers I named are the most powerful in Europe. After all, Russia is partly European but partly Asiatic.⁸

This attitude seems to have given rise to Soviet fears of a resuscitation of either a Four Power Pact⁹ or a Stresa-type agreement to settle Europe's affairs without the participation of the USSR. Izvestia carried an article to this effect on February 28th, which referred to Anglo-Italian and Anglo-German talks thus:

The Prime-Minister has already expressed the hope of reviving a pact of four Powers, including Germany.... Nevertheless in political circles there is talk about a revival of the tri-partite Stresa pact...There is every reason to believe that this very prospect (though not the hope of realizing the Four Power Pact, which would inevitably require a settlement of the colonial question), more than any other factor, has influenced Conservative circles during the last week.¹⁰

⁷ See Izvestia, February 1st, 14th, 17th, 20th, 28th and March 1st, 11th 1938.

⁸ Prime Minister's reply to Parliamentary question by Mr. Mander, March 3rd 1938. PRO, FO371/21661, C1489/95/62.

⁹ Moscow was aware of Chamberlain's predilection for a Four Power settlement of European problems. See, Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii" p.714. Gromyko quotes Soviet Foreign Policy Archives, AVP SSSR, f.011, 1937 g., p.1, d.48306, l.48.

¹⁰ Izvestia, February 28th 1938.

The Narkomindel was apparently under few illusions as to the probable attitude of the British Government in the event of a German occupation of Austria.¹¹

When this took place, on March 12th 1938, the Soviet press was preoccupied with the trial of the "Right-wing Trotskyites" and thus news of the Anschluss appeared only on the back page of Izvestia.¹² The next days issue however, saw renewed criticism of British policy, and hinted at collusion between the British and German Governments. "German troops", the article stated, "crossed the Austrian frontier on the very day when the German Minister of Foreign Affairs was a guest of the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain."¹³ The article commented further upon the damage done to French

¹¹ See, Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", pp.714-718. Harvey describes Eden's attitude at an F.O. meeting of February 15th as being determined "not to get into the false position of giving the Austrians advice and then being saddled with the responsibility if they accept advice and the situation gets worse." Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940", p.90.

¹² See Izvestia, March 13th 1938.

¹³ Izvestia, March 14th 1938. News of the Anschluss came during a farewell luncheon in Ribbentrop's honour at Downing Street. According to Templewood, Ribbentrop seemed "completely taken aback. Halifax was convinced that either he knew nothing of the coup, or that, if he did, he was a most successful and barefaced liar in concealing his knowledge of it". Templewood, "Nine Troubled Years", p.282. See also, D.Dilks, ed., "The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1930-1945", (London, 1971), p.60, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-1940" p.113. Dalton, No.19, April 7th 1938. For a brief account of the British reactions to the Anschluss, see, Gilbert and Gott, "The Appeasers", pp.116-117. As far as France was concerned there was no reaction, "for it so happened that between Thursday, March 10th, and Sunday March 13th...France had no government." H.Noguères. "Munich or the Phoney Peace", (London, 1965), pp.21-22. Thus when Leon Blum's Government took office, the new Foreign Minister, Paul-Boncour, found himself faced with a 'fait accompli' in Austria, See *ibid.*, p.22.

interests by the Anschluss and the clear threat to Czechoslovakia now that Austria had become a province of the Third Reich. "The latest events did not come as a surprise to the Soviet Union", the article concluded, "We made our evaluation of the policies of the fascist aggressors some time ago."¹⁴

In view of this Soviet attitude, Moscow's decision to call for international collective measures to halt further aggression, seems all the more surprising. To judge by its prolonged and constant criticism of the British and French Governments, the Soviet Union could hardly expect anything other than a negative response. Maisky explains the Soviet attitude thus:

However great and legitimate, after all that had happened, was the Soviet Government's mistrust of the Chamberlain Government, nevertheless at this critical moment the leaders of the USSR made an attempt to appeal to the common sense of the leaders of Great Britain.¹⁵

Thus, at a press conference on March 17th, Litvinov proposed the calling of an international conference¹⁶ to deal with the situation created by the events in Austria. The text of Litvinov's statement was sent to the Governments of Britain, France, the USA and Czechoslovakia. Maisky visited Cadogan at the Foreign Office on the same day, and left a copy of the Soviet proposals for the consideration of the British Government. The note stated that whereas previous cases of aggression had taken place either outside Europe, or merely on its periphery,

¹⁴ Izvestia, March 14th 1938.

¹⁵ Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.74.

¹⁶ Eubank states that Litvinov "did not actually call for a four-power conference as some have claimed". K.Eubank, "Munich", (Oklahoma, 1963). p.31. This is a rather pedantic point as the British Government saw the proposal as a call for such a conference, and Eubank himself later refers to the Soviet move as an attempt to create an international conference. See, *ibid.*, p.32.

in this case, however, violence has been perpetrated in the centre of Europe thus creating an undoubted menace, not only to the eleven states now adjacent to the aggressor, but to all European countries and not only European... The Soviet Government is on its part as heretofore prepared to participate in collective actions which would be decided upon jointly with it, and which would aim at checking the further development of aggression and at eliminating the increased danger of a new world massacre.

The Soviet Government is prepared to commence immediately together with other states in the League of Nations or outside of it the discussion of practical measures called for by the present circumstances.

Tomorrow it may be too late, but today the time has not yet passed if all the States and especially the Great Powers will adopt a firm and unequivocal stand in regard to the problem of collective salvation of peace.¹⁷

The effect of these proposals on the Foreign Office was not unpredictable. Halifax acknowledged the Russian suggestion, stating that the British Government would warmly welcome an international assembly of the type proposed by Russia, but that,

A conference only attended by some of the European Powers, and designed less to secure the settlement of outstanding problems than to organise concerted action against aggression, would not necessarily in the view of His Majesty's Government have such a favourable effect on the prospects of European peace...though there may be a difference of opinion regarding the methods to be adopted, His Majesty's Government are no less anxious than the Soviet Government, to find effective means of strengthening the cause of peace.¹⁸

¹⁷ Note handed to H.M. Government by the Soviet Ambassador, March 18th 1938. PRO, FO371/21626, C1935/95/62. Maisky handed two notes to Cadogan, one on the 17th, the text of which appears in DBFP, Series 3, Vol. I, No. 90, and the revised version, quoted above, which Cadogan received on March 18th. Both versions read rather clumsily though there are no differences of meaning between the two texts. See also, "Novie dokumenty iz istorii Myunkhena", (Hereinafter: NDM), (Moscow, 1958), No. 4. Declaration of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs to representatives of the press, March 17th 1938.

¹⁸ DBFP, Series 3, Vol. 1, No. 116. Halifax to the Soviet Ambassador in London, March 24th 1938. In quoting the British reply in his account of these events, Maisky deletes the words "...less to secure the settlement of outstanding problems than...". Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p. 75.

Cadogan's minute on the draft of this reply expressed a somewhat different view:

The Russian object is to precipitate confusion and war in Europe; they will not participate usefully themselves; they will hope for world revolution as a result (and a very likely one, too)....If we decide upon a forward policy - of calling the German bluff - it may be something to have Russia behind us, more or less. If we move under Litvinoff's orders, I believe we shall precipitate a conflict.¹⁹

Chamberlain's speech in the House of Commons on March 24th publicly set the seal on the Soviet proposals for an international conference:

His Majesty's Government would welcome the assembly of any conference, at which it might be expected that all European nations would consent to be represented, and at which it might therefore be found possible to discuss matters in regard to which anxiety is at present felt. In present circumstances however they are obliged to recognise that no such expectation can be entertained and the Soviet Government do not in fact appear to entertain it. Their proposal would appear to involve less a consultation with a view to settlement than a concerting of action against an eventuality that has not yet arisen. Its object would appear to be to negotiate such mutual undertakings in advance to resist aggression, as I have referred to, which for reasons given His Majesty's Government are of the opinion that the indirect, but nonetheless inevitable, consequence of such an action as is proposed by the Soviet Government would be to aggravate the tendency towards the establishment of exclusive groups of nations, which must in the view of His Majesty's Government be inimical to the prospects of European peace.²⁰

On March 26th, Pravda, with some accuracy, dismissed Chamberlain's explanations as having been made with the intention of disarming the growing domestic opposition to his policies.²¹ The reaction of the French Government was similar to that of Britain. Phipps reported from Paris that the French press had

¹⁹ Minute by Cadogan, March 23rd 1938. PRO,FO371/21626,C1935/95/62.

²⁰ Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons, March 24th 1938. PRO,FO371/21627, C2102/317/67. Two weeks later Chamberlain told the House that his policy had "won the general approval of the whole country; and not only this country, but I may say practically the whole world, with the possible exception of Russia". Quoted from Hansard by M.Gilbert. "Britain and Germany between the Wars", (London, 1964), p.133.

²¹ See Pravda, March 26th 1938.

also attached little importance to Litvinov's proposal.²²

Neither the British nor the French negative responses to the idea of an international conference can have been entirely unexpected in Moscow, while the American rejection must have been even more of a foregone conclusion.²³ This raises the question of the sincerity of the Russian proposal which was made in the face of what in Soviet eyes was a consistently unreliable record on the part of London and Paris. The isolated successes of Montreux and Nyon could no longer outweigh the other features of Western policy in any serious Soviet appraisal of the international situation. Yet the proposal was made.

Moscow's reasons for such an initiative seem to have much in common with the Soviet approach to disarmament of the early 1930s. In the unlikely event of the Russian suggestion being adopted by the Western Powers, the USSR would have been assured of a place in any subsequent international discussions. This was important to the Kremlin, for the Brussels Conference and the Non-Intervention Committee had indicated that the exclusion of the Soviet Union from the affairs of Europe and the Far East was increasingly the aim of Britain and France. If, on the other hand, the proposal was rejected, Moscow could point to its 'ceaseless efforts' in the cause of collective

²² Phipps to Halifax, March 29th 1938. PRO, FO371/21626, C2334/95/62.

²³ The US Under Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, informed the French Government that the USA "was not inclined to participate in such a conference as that proposed, in view of our belief that the moment was not propitious and that it was highly doubtful that any practical results could be achieved." FRUS, "Soviet Union 1933-39", p.541. Under Secretary of State (Welles) to the French Ambassador (Saint-Quentin), March 23rd 1938. See also, *ibid.*, p.539. Eubank suggests that the Soviet proposal specifically included Britain and the USA because Moscow realized they would reject the idea of any such assembly, thus, "The note gave the Soviet Union a good basis for its contribution to the Munich myth." Eubank, "Munich", p.32.

security and lay the blame for the failure of this policy at the feet of Britain and France.²⁴

A second function of the proposal was as a probe with which to assess the intentions of London and Paris, much as Soviet membership of the moribund Non-Intervention Committee continued to do. Potemkin had informed Grzybowski, the Polish Ambassador to the USSR, on March 15th, that Russia would go no further than the Western Powers "who must in the first place define their attitude to the German action."²⁵ To the Kremlin it seemed evident that Hitler's next objective would be Czechoslovakia.²⁶ But unlike Austria, the Czechs had concluded a mutual-assistance pact with the USSR. The terms of the treaty were to become operative only after France had accorded aid to Czechoslovakia in the event of an attack on the latter. It was therefore vital for the Soviet Union to know the likely reactions of France in the event of a German threat to Czechoslovakia. The proposal to hold an international conference revealed that France was unlikely to act independently of Great Britain and this cast doubt upon the probability of the French fulfilling their treaty obligations. This seems to be confirmed by the change which Davies noted in Litvinov's attitude towards the French. On March 14th, Litvinov confided to Davies that he believed the USSR could expect French support

²⁴ This is what happened. See, for example, A.D.Nikonov, "The Origin of World War II and the Pre-war European Political Crisis of 1939", (Moscow, 1955), p.64.

²⁵ SPO, Vol.VI, No.239. Grzybowski to Beck, March 15th 1938. It is of course possible that Moscow had already assessed probable Western reactions to the Anschluss by March 17th, when Litvinov made his proposal.

²⁶ Litvinov told Chilston that the Soviet Union's obligation to aid Czechoslovakia depended on French actions. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.85. Chilston to Halifax, March 15th 1938. See also, DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, Nos, 87 and 92.

should Czechoslovakia be threatened.²⁷ By March 23rd, Litvinov's view was that, "France has no confidence in the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union has no confidence in France."²⁸

As the nation with most to fear from a hostile Russian reaction to the Anschluss, German comments carry some weight. Tippleskirch reported from Moscow on March 18th, that,

"Litvinov's ideas and proposals are intended to influence certain political circles in the Western Powers, by the usual propaganda means, and by no means least, to influence public opinion in America. The decisive factor here is that the Soviet Government is avoiding committing itself definitely and is leaving it to the other powers to decide upon practical measures, but at bottom is only concerned in strengthening its front against the aggressors, i.e. the opponents of the Soviet Union....

In face of the internal and military situation of the Soviet Union, Litvinov has obviously done the only thing immediately possible for him, namely, as mediator, raised his voice in a general appeal and warning to the "friends of peace."²⁹

The rejection of the conference proposal, whatever its aim, seems to have played a significant part in both Litvinov's personal disillusionment³⁰ with British and French policies, and in the Soviet Government's attitude to the policy of collective security. Britain and France had demonstrated once more that they were far from anxious to contemplate collective measures against aggression, especially if such measures involved Soviet participation in European affairs. As ever, the only Soviet gains from the proposal were in the field of

²⁷ FRUS, Soviet Union 1933-1939, p.533. Memorandum by the Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Davies) of a Conversation with Soviet People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs (Litvinov), March 14th 1938.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.542-544. The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Davies) to the Secretary of State, April 1st 1938. See also, Davies "Mission to Moscow", p.189.

²⁹ DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.96, pp.180-181. Tippleskirch to the Foreign Ministry, March 18th 1938.

³⁰ Litvinov told Davies, on March 23rd, that he foresaw, "a Fascist peace imposed by Germany and Italy...the smaller states of Rumania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Czechoslovakia were all frightened and that the only thing that would prevent complete Fascist domination of Europe was a change of government or policy in Great Britain." Davies, "Mission to Moscow", pp.189-190.

propaganda, enabling the USSR to maintain its international position as the champion of collective security by drawing attention to its efforts to organise joint action against aggression. The democracies had again revealed their true intention by refusing to take up this Soviet call for an international conference.

In the period leading up to the Munich Agreement of September 30th 1938, Moscow continued to probe the Western attitude towards the increasing German pressure on Czechoslovakia. The Soviet Government based its assessment of the policies of Britain and France on their reactions to Russian assurances that the USSR would fulfil its treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia, to Soviet proposals for joint action in the defence of the Czechs, and to further calls for international conferences to deal with the situation.

The continued Soviet support for the policy of collective security may have been merely a front, designed to obscure Stalin's desire for an agreement with Germany. It is, however, not difficult for a leader with as much personal power as Stalin (or Hitler) to conduct two different policies simultaneously, deferring any final decision until one or the other had proved unsuccessful. In December 1936, Kandelaki had made an approach to the German Government. This led to an attempt to open political negotiations with the Germans. By February 11th 1937, it was clear that Hitler had decided not to take up the Russian suggestion.³¹ Stalin made a further

³¹ For details of this Soviet approach, see, Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.432,453. Coulondre had noticed "certain indications of détente in German-Soviet relations", and feared that Moscow would turn to Germany if France did not make efforts to maintain the value of the Franco-Soviet pact. DDF, 2e Série, Vol.V, No.192. Coulondre to Delbos, March 30th 1937. See also, *ibid.*, No.229. François-Poncet to Delbos, April 8th 1937. Davies too, reported that "despite their apparent bitter attitude at the present time" the opinion among Moscow diplomatic circles was that Russia and Germany "would compose any difficulty if there were advantages to be gained." FRUS, Soviet Union 1933-1939, p.373. The Ambassador to the Soviet Union (Davies) to the Secretary of State, February 19th 1937.

attempt to improve political relations with Nazi Germany in April 1939.³² It is not impossible that other approaches were made in the intervening period. It should therefore be emphasised that while Litvinov and others repeated their assurances that the Soviet Union would aid the Czechs according to their treaty obligations, Stalin was at the same time contemplating the possibilities of an accommodation with Germany. Whether the USSR stood aloof from the Czech problem, or whether it played a joint role with Britain and France, would depend upon a positive reaction on the part of these Powers to the proposals which Moscow made between the Anschluss and Munich. The three clear proposals for the assembly of an international conference which Russia made in this period are thus an integral part of the general Soviet approach to the threat to Czechoslovakian security.

The Soviet Government had already promised Czechoslovakia on March 15th, 1938, that it would meet its treaty commitments. Potemkin informed Fierlinger, the Czech Envoy to the USSR that, "As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, no one could ever reproach it for having evaded its international commitments."³³ This was just the first of many such assurances given to the Czech Government. Fierlinger reported that on the same day Litvinov had repeated, in answer to the questions of American journalists, that "the USSR would fulfill its commitments as an ally" to Czechoslovakia.³⁴ Less than two

³² See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, No.215, pp.266-267. Memorandum by State Secretary Weizsäcker, April 17th 1939.

³³ NDM, No.2. Record of a Conversation between Potemkin and Fierlinger, March 15th 1938.

³⁴ Ibid., No.3. Fierlinger to Krofta, March 16th 1938. Chilston reported this press conference, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.92, Chilston to Halifax, March 17th 1938. Kamil Krofta, Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister.

weeks later on March 28th 1938, a visiting Soviet military delegation informed the Chief of the Czech General Staff, that the Soviet Union would aid Czechoslovakia if she were attacked.³⁵ This intention was repeated on April 23rd, when a conference in the Kremlin, consisting of Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich announced that, "If consulted, the USSR is prepared to take, in agreement with France and Czechoslovakia, all measures concerning the security of Czechoslovakia."³⁶

Izvestia contrasted the attitude of the French Government which "had stated that it would fulfill to the letter its obligations by the mutual assistance treaty", with that of Great Britain who had stated that its obligations to Czechoslovakia were those of a member of the League.³⁷ Izvestia asked its readers to recall "how Britain had fulfilled her obligations as a League member with regard to Austria." The article concluded by remarking that Czechoslovakia was not another Austria, as the latter had had no links with the USSR or France, and that it was still not too late for collective action."³⁸

On April 26th, Kalinin, the Soviet President, reaffirmed Russia's support for Czechoslovakia, adding, "It goes without saying that the treaty does not forbid any of the sides from

³⁵ Ibid., No.6. Record of a Conversation between the head of the Soviet military delegation in Czechoslovakia with the Chief of Staff of the Czechoslovakian Army, March 28th 1938. The British Government was aware that the delegation was in Czechoslovakia. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.155. Newton to Halifax, March 24th 1938.

³⁶ NDM, No.7. Fierlinger to Krofta, April 23rd 1938.

³⁷ For the text of Chamberlain's speech of March 24th, concerning the British attitude to Czechoslovakia, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.114. Halifax to H.M. Representatives at Berlin, Paris, Washington, Prague and Budapest, March 24th 1938.

³⁸ Izvestia, March 29th 1938. Such nice distinctions between the French and British attitudes were, however, soon to disappear. See also, Izvestia, March 26th 1938.

coming to the assistance of the other side without waiting for France to do so."³⁹ The May crisis⁴⁰ over Czechoslovakia gave Litvinov another opportunity to promise his Government's support for the Czechs. On May 12th, while at Geneva, he informed Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, that the USSR would act if France fulfilled her obligations. The problem of the passage of troops was to depend on France exerting pressure on Roumania.⁴¹ On May 25th, Litvinov again emphasised the importance of joint staff talks.⁴² He made a further public statement in Leningrad on June 23rd 1938:

Our pacts with France and Czechoslovakia, apart from the provision of aid in case of war, also have the aim of preventing or reducing the danger of war in certain areas of Europe. In the face of threats, at present facing Czechoslovakia, it must be clear to the whole world, that it is the most, if not the only, important factor easing the tension over Czechoslovakia. It must be said, that in promising to help the victim of aggression, the Soviet Government is not using his help as a means of pressure on the victim, to induce it to capitulate before the aggressor and to act in such a way as to render useless whatever aid has been given. Our general policy of peace makes us hope that conflicts arising over Czechoslovakia and her neighbours, will be solved by peaceful means, but we strongly refrain from giving any unasked for advice to the Czechoslovakian

³⁹ M.I.Kalinin, "Mezhdunarodnoe polozhenie", (Moscow, 1938), p.14. See also, NDM, No.8. For a German appraisal of Kalinin's speech, see. DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.153. The British Minister in Prague, Sir Basil Newton, reported Kalinin's assurances to Halifax. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.210. Newton to Halifax, May 12th 1938. See also, *ibid.*, No.163. Newton to Halifax, April 28th 1938.

⁴⁰ Izvestia attributed the fact that no war broke out in May to, "The fact that nobody doubted the loyalty of the Soviet Union to obligations undertaken by it..." Izvestia, May 26th 1938. Pravda, June 3rd 1938, echoed this view. Schulenburg drew different conclusions from the conduct of the Soviet Union during the crisis which "showed that, in the event of a war between Germany and Czechoslovakia, it would at the start be unwilling to commit itself or show its hand." DGFP, Series D, No.261, pp.422-426. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, June 22nd 1938. See also, *ibid.*, No.280.

⁴¹ Bonnet was pessimistic with regard to the possibility of obtaining the passage of Soviet troops through Roumania or Poland. See, G.Bonnet, "Défense de la Paix; De Washington au Quai d'Orsay", (Geneva, 1946). pp.124-126.

⁴² NDM, No.14. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, May 25th 1938.

Government, for we believe in its love of peace and that it is itself the judge of questions concerning the internal structure of its state, that it will itself find the reasonable limit of its concessions, compatible with its national prestige, sovereignty and independence, that from the international point of view Czechoslovakia is the defending country and that the responsibility and consequences will in any case lie on the side of the attacker...the Soviet Government, at least, has relieved itself of responsibility for the further development of events... the Soviet Union asks nothing for itself, does not wish to impose itself on anybody as partner or ally, but merely agrees to collective cooperation...⁴³

This was followed two days later by yet another statement from Moscow promising aid to Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴

On August 17th, Maisky saw Halifax in London, and after criticising Britain's lack of firmness with Germany, he said that if Czechoslovakia was attacked, Russia would "certainly do their bit."⁴⁵ Germany too, was informed directly of the Soviet intention to aid Czechoslovakia if she was attacked.

On August 22nd, Litvinov informed Schulenburg that

the Czechoslovak people would fight as one man for their independence, that France would declare war on Germany if she attacked Czechoslovakia, that whether Chamberlain liked it or not Britain could not leave France without assistance and that we shall also fulfill our commitments to Czechoslovakia... Germany was not so much concerned about the Sudeten Germans; she aimed at the annihilation of Czechoslovakia as a whole.⁴⁶

⁴³ M.Litvinov, "K sovremennomu mezhdunarodnomu polozheniu", (Moscow, 1938), pp.20-21.

⁴⁴ See, NDM, No.20. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, June 25th 1938. S.S. Alexandrovsky, Soviet Ambassador in Czechoslovakia.

⁴⁵ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.11, No.637. Halifax to Chilston, August 17th, 1938. Maisky had previously complained to Cliphant that Britain was bludgeoning the Czech Premier Benes, and was not being firm enough with Germany. Record of a conversation between Maisky and Cliphant, August 9th 1938. PRO,FO371/21731, C8218/1941/18.

⁴⁶ See, Ponomaryov, "History of Soviet Foreign Policy", p.344. Ponomaryov quotes USSR Foreign Policy Archives (AVP). See also, DGFP, Series D, Vol.11, No.396, p.630. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, August 26th 1938. See also, ibid., No.381, and, NDM, No.24.

France, despite the many assurances of Soviet support for the Czechs, officially asked Moscow for the first time what its attitude would be, and how assistance was to be rendered to Czechoslovakia if Poland and Roumania refused to give transit rights to Soviet troops. On the same day, September 2nd, Litvinov saw Payart, the French Chargé d' Affaires, and informed him of Soviet intentions. He stated that pressure should be brought to bear on Poland and Roumania by means of a League decision. He continued by suggesting Franco-Soviet-Czech staff talks and a conference of those Powers wishing to preserve peace:

We feel...that at the present moment such a conference with the participation of Britain, France and the USSR and a common declaration, which, no doubt will have a better chance of restraining Hitler from military adventures than any other measures.⁴⁷

Thus once again the USSR had suggested the assembly of an international conference to deal with the international situation. The French appear to have ignored the proposal as they had in March.

Maisky relates⁴⁸ that on September 3rd he received a telegram from the Narkomindel informing him of Litvinov's suggestions to Payart. He decided to inform Churchill of the details and travelled down to Chartwell to do so. Churchill in turn informed Halifax.⁴⁹ Maisky also repeated the substance of the Soviet proposals to Lloyd George and to Arthur Greenwood,

⁴⁷ NDM, No.26. Litvinov to Alexandrovsky, September 2nd 1938. This offer was repeated to Payart on September 5th 1938. See *ibid.*, No.27. See also, Bonnet, "Defense de la Paix; De Washington au Quai d'Orsay", pp.197-203.

⁴⁸ Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler", pp.79-80.

⁴⁹ See, Churchill, "The Second World War", Vol.I: "The Gathering Storm", pp.229-230. Churchill gives September 2nd as the date of Maisky's visit. September 3rd is the more likely date. Halifax informed Churchill that he would keep his comments in mind.

the deputy leader of the Labour Party. Maisky's motives were presumably as much to embarrass the Chamberlain Government by furnishing the opposition with information of the latest Franco-Soviet developments, as to promote the calling of an international conference.

On September 8th, Maisky visited Halifax at the latter's request, in connection with the Times leader⁵⁰ of the previous day about the cession of the Sudeten areas to Germany. Halifax said a 'démenti' had been issued. The Soviet Ambassador then informed Halifax that the Soviet Union would be willing to cooperate with France and the United Kingdom (and possibly the USA) in a joint note to Berlin.⁵¹ This proposal, also made to the French by Litvinov, led to nothing. Maisky left for Geneva on September 9th.⁵² The British Government did not contact Soviet representatives again until September 23rd.

Meanwhile, the tension over the Czechoslovakian situation increased, as did the pressure put on the Czech Government by Britain and France. In an effort to dispel the misunderstanding which had arisen between Paris and Moscow over the replies of the latter to French requests for information on the Soviet position, Coulondre saw Potemkin on September 11th 1938.

Potemkin suggested the publication of a joint declaration aimed

⁵⁰ Pravda, September 8th 1938, reported the Times article thus: "The Times supports Hitler's plans".

⁵¹ See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.808. Halifax to Chilston, September 8th 1938. See also, Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.81. Potemkin told Chilston on the same day that Russia was not obliged to intervene in Czechoslovakia unless France was actually engaged. Chilston had the impression that Potemkin doubted whether France was likely to make any such move. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.802. Chilston to Halifax, September 8th 1938.

⁵² See, David Lloyd George Papers, (Hereinafter: Lloyd George), G/14/1/17, September 6th 1938.

at discouraging German aggression. He also repeated the other proposals made to Payart on September 2nd and 5th, concerning an appeal to the League and tripartite staff talks, and reaffirmed Soviet readiness to act with France in the event of a German attack on Czechoslovakia.⁵³

Benes asked Moscow on September 19th, to reply immediately as to whether Czechoslovakia could count on the implementation of the Soviet-Czech mutual-assistance pact. On September 20th, Fierlinger informed his Government:

Potemkin has just communicated to me the answer of the first question-whether the USSR is prepared to render immediate and effective assistance if France remains true to the pact. The Government answers: yes, immediate and effective. To the second question-whether the USSR is prepared to fulfil its obligations in accordance with articles 16 and 17 in the event of an appeal in the League of Nations-the Government answers: yes, on any terms.⁵⁴

Litvinov's address to the League of Nations on September 21st 1938, was equally explicit in its reference to both Czech and French enquiries as to the attitude of the Soviet Government:

I must plainly declare here that the Soviet Government bears no responsibility whatsoever for the events now taking place, and for the fatal consequences which may inexorably ensue...the Soviet Government immediately after the Anschluss, officially approached the other European Great Powers with a proposal for an immediate collective deliberation on the possible consequences of that event, in order to adopt collective preventive measures. To our regret, this proposal, which, if carried out, could have saved us from the alarm which all the world now feels for the fate of Czechoslovakia, did not receive its just appreciation...When, a few days before I left for Geneva, the French Government for the first time enquired as to our attitude in the event of an attack on Czechoslovakia, I gave in the name of my Government the following perfectly clear and unambiguous reply.

We intend to fulfil our obligations under the pact and, together with France, to afford assistance to Czechoslovakia by the ways open to us. Our War Department

⁵³ See, NDM, No.30. Record of a Conversation between Potemkin and Coulondre, September 11th 1938.

⁵⁴ Ibid., No.39. Fierlinger to Krofta, September 20th 1938. See also, Nos.36, 37, 38.

is ready immediately to participate in a conference with representatives of the French and Czechoslovak War Departments in order to discuss the measures appropriate to the moment. Independently of this, we should consider it desirable that the question be raised at the League of Nations, if only as yet under Article 11, with the object, first of mobilizing public opinion and, secondly, of ascertaining the position of certain other States, whose passive aid might be extremely valuable. It was necessary, however, to exhaust all means of averting an armed conflict, and we considered one such method to be immediate consultation between the Great Powers of Europe and other interested States, in order if possible to decide on the terms of a collective demarche.

This is how our reply was framed. It was only two days ago that the Czechoslovak Government addressed a formal enquiry to my Government as to whether the Soviet Union is prepared, in accordance with the Soviet-Czech pact, to render Czechoslovakia immediate and effective aid if France, loyal to her obligations, will render similar assistance, to which my Government gave a clear answer in the affirmative.⁵⁵

On September 23rd, Litvinov repeated the point that the USSR was only obliged to go to Czechoslovakia's assistance if France did so first, and reaffirmed his Government's readiness to act under these circumstances.⁵⁶

Geneva was the scene of the next Soviet proposal for an international conference. The initiator of the process which led to the proposal was the British M.P. Robert Boothby (now Lord Boothby). He saw Litvinov and Maisky in their hotel suite in Geneva on September 22nd. Litvinov complained that no British representative had been to see him. Russia, he said, would aid Czechoslovakia if France did so, and he gave Boothby the number of aircraft which would be put at Czechoslovakia's disposal. Boothby went directly to Lord de la Warr, the Lord Privy Seal who, with R.A. Butler, was representing Great Britain at Geneva. He suggested that de la Warr should see

⁵⁵ Degras, Vol.III, pp.302-303.

⁵⁶ See, *ibid.*, pp.304-305.

Litvinov immediately. The next morning Boothby flew back to London where he passed on his information to Halifax.⁵⁷

Halifax instructed Butler and de la Warr on September 23rd, to meet Litvinov and sound out his views.⁵⁸ Butler's report of the interview reached Halifax the next day. Litvinov welcomed the British interest and repeated that the USSR would aid Czechoslovakia if France acted according to her treaty obligations:

He had for long been hoping for conversations between Great Britain, France and Russia, and he would like to suggest to us in this informal conversation that a meeting of the three Powers mentioned, together with Roumania and any other small Power who could be regarded as reliable, should take place away from the atmosphere of Geneva, and preferably in Paris, and so show Germans that we mean business."

Litvinov added that he was not informed of Russia's military preparations⁵⁹ as he had been away for some time. He informed Butler and de la Warr that the Soviet non-aggression pact with Poland would lapse in the event of a Polish attack on the Teschen area of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁰ Both Litvinov and Maisky, who was also present, were pessimistic, but hoped for early

⁵⁷ See, R.Boothby, "I Fight to Live", (London, 1947), pp.160-162. Letter from Lord Boothby to S.Aster, June 8th 1968. Used by permission of S.Aster. See also, Lloyd George, G/3/13/9, Memorandum by Boothby on his activities during 1938.

⁵⁸ See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.1043. Halifax to Butler, September 23rd 1938. Halifax also instructed Phipps in Paris to ascertain the Soviet position with regard to its assistance to Czechoslovakia. Halifax informed the Cabinet of his actions on the same day. See, CAB 27/646, September 23rd 1938. Phipps's reply was that, "M.Bonnet is not much impressed by this prospective late and limited Russian help." See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.1056. Phipps to Halifax, September 23rd 1938.

⁵⁹ Maisky later told Boothby that, "The British Government was so anxious to prove that the Russians had killed all their officers, and had no aeroplanes, that they never dared to ask in explicit terms how many aeroplanes the Russians were prepared to place at the disposal of Czechoslovakia in the event of war." Lloyd George, G/3/13/9, Memorandum by Boothby on his activities during 1938.

⁶⁰ On September 23rd, the Soviet Union sent Poland a note to this effect. See, Degras, Vol.III, p.305. NDM, No.50. SPO, Vol.VI, Nos. 252 and 258. Beck told the German Ambassador in Warsaw, Moltke, that the Soviet action was merely a propaganda gesture. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.593. See also, Beck, "Final Report", pp.157-158.

According to Maisky, the following exchanges took place after de la Warr and Butler had agreed on the desirability of a conference:

Where would it be best of all to hold a conference? After reflecting on this for a while, De La Warr asked: "What about London?" Litvinov replied: "I don't object." De La Warr wondered: "Could you come to such a conference?" Litvinov replied: "If there are ministers from other countries, I'm personally ready to go to London." De La Warr said that he was highly satisfied with the conversation and would immediately inform the Foreign Office. He later added: "We will talk about other details tomorrow when the reply comes from London."⁶²

In his memoirs Butler states that after his meeting with the two Russians he was

left in no doubt that the Russians themselves did not mean business. Litvinov had been deliberately evasive and vague, except when he had said that if France acted the Soviet would act too...this was tantamount to saying that if Bonnet threw himself off the Eiffel Tower Litvinov would be there to catch him....

My interview with Litvinov only confirmed our conclusion that, both on political and military grounds, the USSR could not be trusted to wage war in defence of interests that were not bound up with her own security.⁶³

Butler also believed that Litvinov's assertion, that he was not informed of Russian military preparations, was unlikely to be true.⁶⁴ The difference in interpretation of the interview between two of the participants, Maisky and Butler, could hardly be more striking. Maisky interprets Litvinov's offer

⁶¹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.1071. Butler to Halifax, September 24th 1938.

⁶² Maisky, Letter to the Times, June 8th 1971. See also, Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", pp.82-83. For other accounts of the meeting see, G.Bilainkin, "Ivan Mikhailovitch Maisky", (London, 1944), p.213. Gilbert and Gott, "The Appeasers", (London, 1963), p.158. Dell, "The Geneva Racket", p.277. Dell mistakenly puts the date for the meeting as September 22nd. Rothstein, "The Munich Conspiracy", pp.183-186. Wheeler-Bennett, "Munich: Prologue to Tragedy", p.150. G.E.R.Gedye, "Fallen Bastions", (London, 1939), p.496.

⁶³ Lord Butler "The Art of the Possible", (London, 1971), pp.70-72. The serialisation of these memoirs in the Times was the occasion of the above-mentioned letter from Maisky.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.71. Over thirty years after the event, neither Butler nor Maisky have changed their views concerning the meeting in Geneva.

of a conference and aid to Czechoslovakia as a sincere attempt to preserve peace by checking German demands. Butler saw Litvinov's proposal as an attempt to embroil France in a war with Germany.

Butler's views might be the more understandable if the meeting in Geneva had been the first occasion upon which the Soviet Union had stated its intentions with regard to Czechoslovakia. But if Litvinov's proposal is taken in the context of the almost daunting number of Russian appeals and assurances which had been made since March 15th, it becomes very difficult to dismiss Litvinov's comments as a mere bluff.⁶⁵

In common with Litvinov's suggestion of March 1938, this proposal had the twin aims of assessing the attitudes of Britain and France while scoring propaganda points from the consistent Soviet position towards Czechoslovakia. However, this offer of an international conference differed from its predecessor in that a conference held in September had at least the possibility of taking measures against an identifiable threat, whereas in March there had been only the 'fait accompli' of the Anschluss to discuss. Any evaluation of this particular proposal must be seen in the wider context of the Soviet approach to the Czechoslovakian crisis.

Russian diplomatic moves before Munich are well documented. The military preparations which the USSR made in the same period

⁶⁵ This is Eubank's view. He states, "Litvinov had already proposed a similar meeting and been rebuffed. He knew this proposal would meet a comparable fate and that such a meeting would not produce swift action. He knew also that only force and the determination to use it would show Germany that they meant business. When his meeting convened, perhaps Czechoslovakia would then be no more, and the Mutual Assistance Pact could vanish. Should France actually fight, he could use the need for such conversations to delay Russian participation until Czechoslovakia was gone." Eubank, "Munich", p.187. Celovsky, however, believes that Litvinov's offer cannot be so dismissed. See, B.Celovsky, "Das Münchener Abkommen von 1938", (Stuttgart, 1958), p.441.

are less clear. If aid was indeed to be sent to Czechoslovakia, as Moscow had often asserted, then the Red Army would have to be in a state of readiness along the USSR's Western border. In London and Paris the purges were generally held to have eliminated the Red Army's effectiveness as a fighting force.⁶⁶ Tippleskirch reported that during the Czechoslovakian crisis the Soviet Union had taken no military measures:

Nothing special was observed by us here during the critical days. Whereas other governments adopted preliminary measures of mobilisation, the Soviet Government does not seem to have done anything of the sort.⁶⁷

Russian sources state that the USSR moved to its Western border, "thirty infantry divisions, and put air and tank units on a war footing. For dispatch to Czechoslovakia 246 bombers and 302 fighters were prepared, and were concentrated in two special military districts - those of Byelorussia and Kiev."⁶⁸ In response to a message from Gamelin on September 24th,

⁶⁶ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.148. Chilston to Halifax, April 19th 1938. The British Military Attaché, Colonel Firebrace, wrote; "From the military point of view there must be considerable doubt as to whether the Soviet Union is capable of fulfilling its obligations under the pact with Czechoslovakia and France by undertaking a war of offence." He added that the French Military Attaché was not over-confident of Soviet intentions or capabilities." See also, *ibid.*, No.164. Record of Anglo-French Conversations held at No.10, Downing Street, April 28th-29th 1938. For a description of the effects of the purge on the Soviet Armed Forces, see. Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp.449-509. Conquest, "The Great Terror", pp.277-323.

⁶⁷ DGFP, Series D, Vol.IV, No.476. Tippleskirch to Counsellor of Legation Schliep, October 3rd 1938. It must be stated that foreign military attachés in Moscow, like all foreign diplomats, had virtually nothing upon which to base their reports, save rumour and their own very restricted observations.

⁶⁸ AVP SSSR, f.048-a, p.23, p.284, t.1, d.28, l. 120-121, quoted by Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, p.737.

informing the Soviet Government of German troop concentrations on the Czech frontier,

the Soviet People's Commissariat of Defence dispatched the following telegram to the USSR Air Attache in Paris, Vasilechenko: 'You are instructed, after meeting Gamelin, to personally thank him for the information of the French Command's undertakings and to convey the following:

Our Command has, meanwhile adopted the following preventive measures:

1. Thirty infantry divisions have been deployed to areas adjoining the Western border. The same has been done in relation to cavalry divisions.
 2. Units have correspondingly been replenished (sic) with reserves.
 3. As regards our technical troops - air and armour units - they are in full readiness.
- Urgently report the results.'

Vasilchenko reported to Moscow the next day that the mission had been carried out, but the French had turned a deaf ear to these words.⁶⁹

Erickson's opinion is that while Russian protestations of support for Czechoslovakia were undeniable, the Soviet Government found its lack of a common frontier with its Czechoslovakian ally "a convenient pretext for limiting its aid." A move against Poland, however, he feels "would have been well within the capacity of the Red Army, weakened as it was by the purge." He concludes, "If this was indeed the core of the Soviet military position at the time of the Czechoslovak crisis, then it was a policy as cynical and self-interested as the western powers' was dubious."⁷⁰

It is of course possible that Stalin felt so confident that Britain and France would not act, that he saw no risk in

⁶⁹ Maisky, Letter to the Times, June 8th 1971. See also, NDM, No. 53. Telegram from the People's Commissariat of Defence USSR to the USSR Air Attaché in France, September 25th 1938. Gamelin had in fact left for London on the morning of September 26th; so Vasilchenko transmitted his Government's reply to London. See NDM, No. 54. Vasilchenko to the People's Commissariat of Defence USSR, September 26th 1938. For a considerably more detailed account of Soviet military preparations during the crisis, see, AN Grylev, "Nakanune i v dni Myunkhena", in S.I. Praslov and P.I. Resonov, "Sovetsko-Chekhoslovatskie otnosheniya mezhdru dvumya voynami, 1918-1939", (Moscow, 1968), pp. 218-226.

⁷⁰ Erickson, "The Soviet High Command", pp. 503-504. Whether the Russian threat to Poland was genuine or not, by late November 1938 Soviet-Polish relations were back to normal. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol. III, No. 382. Kennard to Halifax, November 27th 1938. Sir Howard Kennard, British Ambassador to Poland. See also, ibid., No. 417. For the series of exchanges leading to normalization of Polish-Soviet relations, see, SFO, Vol. VI, Nos. 263-270.

offering his aid to the Czechs. But to judge from his previous behaviour in international affairs, it seems improbable that Stalin would run the slightest risk of having Soviet offers of aid accepted if this was not his aim. Nor would he wish to compromise the carefully constructed edifice of Soviet moral superiority by resorting to obstructive tactics in the event that his offers had been accepted. Stalin may have intended his declarations of support for Czechoslovakia as a means of provoking France into war with Germany. But what Stalin could have gained from such a conflict is uncertain. If Russia remained aloof, her strategic position in Central Europe would be greatly weakened. If the USSR went to Czechoslovakia's assistance, Stalin could at least gain credit for this, while thwarting German expansion in an area close to the Russian border. Furthermore, Soviet participation in the Sino-Japanese War and in the Spanish Civil War, though not involving large numbers of Soviet military personnel, had demonstrated that the USSR was prepared to become involved in conflicts beyond its frontiers. Thus it seems most probable that Soviet assertions of support for Czechoslovakia, strictly according to the mutual assistance pact, were genuine. The form⁷¹ and extent of such assistance is another question.

It is difficult to reach a firm conclusion concerning Soviet intentions in this period, though the available evidence suggests that it would be inaccurate to view everything Moscow said and did between March and September 1938, as part of an enormous bluff. The most reasonable conclusion is therefore that Litvinov's proposal of an international conference was a

⁷¹ For reports of the arrival of Soviet-built aircraft in Czechoslovakia, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, Nos.141, 146 and 370. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.1, No.411. These were aircraft bought by the Czech Government. Had hostilities broken out, it seems likely that initial Soviet aid, if sent, would have been in the form of aircraft deliveries.

sincere attempt to deal with the Czechoslovakian problem. This view is supported by the knowledge that Stalin, at the time, had not succeeded in reaching a political understanding with Hitler. Thus Stalin had no real alternative course of action open to him, short of deliberately adopting a policy of isolation which would have run counter to the whole trend of Soviet foreign policy in the previous twenty years. In fact Russian diplomatic activity prior to the Munich Agreement seems to have been specifically designed to ensure the participation of the USSR in any discussion or settlement of the Czechoslovakian crisis. To propose an international conference to the representatives of a Government whose leader was not only ill-disposed towards Russia but also was at the very time of the proposal negotiating with Hitler in Godesberg, indicates that Moscow's hopes of a positive response cannot have been high. If there was, however, a remote chance that the Soviet Union by its participation, could avert a new Four Power Pact, then Stalin was prepared to take it, especially if to do so would involve a Soviet propaganda success.

Whatever the real motives⁷² behind the proposal, two undeniable facts remain. Firstly, that any effective assistance to Czechoslovakia would have to come through or over Roumania⁷³ or Poland. Secondly, that the Soviet-Czechoslovakian pact specifically stated that the USSR was obliged to aid the Czechs only if France did so first. The initiative thus lay entirely with France. The Soviet Union can hardly be blamed for making

⁷² Eubank dismisses all the Soviet assurances of support for Czechoslovakia as a screen behind which Moscow could shelter while reaping rich propaganda rewards, and describes the Russian position as "legalistic". See, Eubank, "Munich", pp.107-114.

⁷³ At this time Roumania was prepared to permit the transit of Soviet aircraft to Czechoslovakia, and relations between the USSR and Roumania were good. See, V.Moisuc, "Actions diplomatiques de la Roumanie au secours de la Tchécoslovaquie à la veille du pacte de Munich", Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, (Bucharest, 1967), VI, 3, p.428. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.898.

what capital it could from its position of strength.

The USSR was involved in one further proposal for an international conference before the Munich Agreement. This took place under rather confused circumstances. On September 28th, Potemkin sent the following reply to the U.S. Charge d' Affaires:

The Soviet Government considers that a more effective means of averting further aggression and a new world war is the immediate convening of an international conference. As early as March this year, after the forcible seizure of Austria which threatened the peace of Europe, the Soviet Government proposed, to prevent further and dangerous international complications, that such a conference should be called without delay, to seek practical ways of countering aggression and securing peace by collective efforts. Faithful to its desire for peace, the Soviet Government is prepared now also to support the American Government's proposal for an international conference and to take an active part in it.⁷⁴

According to Chilston, the US Charge had suggested verbally to Potemkin that the head of the Soviet State or the Soviet Government should address a personal appeal for the preservation of peace to Germany and Czechoslovakia. No mention was made of an international conference and Chilston "presumed that the Soviet reply refers to the proposal made by Mr. Roosevelt in his latest message to Herr Hitler."⁷⁵ Chamberlain left for Munich on the day after Potemkin's reply, which emphasised still further the gulf between the Soviet and British approaches to the German pressure on Czechoslovakia. By this date Moscow's intention was no doubt the routine preservation of its public posture rather than the inauguration of international action against an eventuality that had all but occurred.

⁷⁴ Degras, Vol.III, p.306. Potemkin's reply is not reproduced in the American documents. See also, Bonnet, "Défense de la Paix. De Washington au Quai d'Orsay", pp.280-281.

⁷⁵ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.1214. Chilston to Halifax, September 29th 1938. For the text of Roosevelt's message to Hitler, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.632.

On September 29th, while Chamberlain was in Munich, Halifax called Maisky to the Foreign Office and informed him about the Munich Conference. He hoped that Maisky would not "misinterpret the fact that this conference did not include a representative of the Soviet Government", to which, he explained, Germany and Italy would have objected. Halifax took some pains to assure Maisky that Russia's exclusion,

in no way signified any weakening of a desire on our part, any more, no doubt, than on that of the French Government, to preserve our understandings and relations with the Soviet Government...the idea of the Anglo-French plan was to substitute guarantees by France and Russia, if the Soviet Government agreed, for the present arrangements between those countries and Czechoslovakia and to reinforce these by a guarantee given by ourselves.....

In the course of our conversation I told M. Maisky that we were fully alive to the importance of working as closely as one might with his Government at this juncture, and that it had been for this purpose that I had asked Lord De la Warr to have the conversation that I was glad to see M. Litvinov had given him the opportunity of having a few days ago at Geneva.⁷⁶

Halifax's explanation reveals quite clearly that the Foreign Office simply had no intention of involving the USSR in the affairs of Central Europe.⁷⁷ None of the Soviet assurances of assistance for Czechoslovakia, proposals for staff talks or international conferences had been given any but the most cursory attention in London or Paris. It would even appear

⁷⁶ DBFP, Series 3, Vol. II, No. 1221. Halifax to Chilston, September 29th 1938.

⁷⁷ Maisky was particularly incensed at the attitude of the British Government. He wrote to Lloyd George on October 4th, enclosing a list of the contacts between the British and Soviet Governments. He concluded thus: "All through this crisis the "contacts" which the British Government had with the Soviet Government were: a) rare; b) in the nature of an exchange of views on the situation or information given to the Soviet Government on the already accomplished facts; c) except the meeting of the 23rd September at Geneva, which had no direct results, there was not a single case of consultation with the Soviet Government on the steps or measures contemplated by the British and French Governments in connection with the crisis." Lloyd George. G/14/1/9, Letter from Maisky, October 4th 1938.

Payart conversation from his own Cabinet colleagues and from the British Government.⁷⁸ The Foreign Office was aware of the majority of the Soviet assurances, but Halifax and Chamberlain chose to ignore them. Bonnet's comment that, "Russia's one wish is to stir up a general war in the troubled waters of which she will fish",⁷⁹ describes exactly the suspicion of the Soviet Union felt by both his own and the British Government.

The idea of a four Power settlement of European problems, with the exclusion of the USSR, was not new. In relation to the Czechoslovakian problem it seems to have made its first appearance as early as July 21st 1938, when Neville Henderson, after a visit from his French colleague, François-Poncet, sent the following suggestion to Halifax:

Might it not then be possible to ask Italian Government to join with His Majesty's Government in proposing to German Government and French Government, a conference of the Four Powers to deal with the problem; the first three Powers on grounds of being chiefly responsible for the creation of Czechoslovakia and the latter as the Power particularly interested.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ See, A.P. Adamthwaite, "French Foreign Policy, April 1938-September 1939, with special reference to the policy of M. Georges Bonnet", (Unpublished PhD. thesis, Leeds University, 1966), p.100. With regard to Bonnet's meeting with Litvinov on September 11th, in Geneva, Adamthwaite writes: "All that is certain is that both Russia and France adopted an equivocal position towards Czechoslovakia. Litvinov and Bonnet made the most of each other's doubts and hesitations". p.105. For Bonnet's delay and distortion in passing information on the Soviet position, to London, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.I, Nos.421, 429 and 523; *ibid.*, Vol.II, Nos. 751 and 791. See also Dalton, No.19, September 17th, 18th, 21st and October 11th. Dalton heard from Maisky and Czech sources that Bonnet had deliberately misrepresented Soviet assurances to Czechoslovakia.

⁷⁹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.751. Phipps to Halifax, September 2nd 1938.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol.I. No.532. Henderson to Halifax, July 21st 1938. In his memoirs, Henderson gives an account of this suggestion and claims it was not adopted on the grounds that "it would be difficult to exclude other Powers from participating in such a conference", and that the Government had decided to send the Runciman mission to Prague. The reference to "other Powers" is no doubt meant to include the Soviet Union. N.Henderson, "Failure of a Mission", (London, 1940), pp.141-142. On August 2nd 1938, Henderson mentioned his idea of a Four Power Conference once more, though on this occasion he said the calling of such a conference should be only as a last resort, with Britain and Italy offering to mediate between France and Germany. Henderson, Berlin, August 2nd 1938. PRO, FO371/21730, C7876/1941/18.

A minute by Vansittart on Henderson's suggestion gives an interesting insight into Foreign Office thinking on the degree to which Russia was seen as a factor in European politics. After commenting that Czechoslovakia was no concern of Italy's who would only support the Germans anyway, Vansittart continued:

However, such an idea would be the thin edge of the German wedge for excluding Russia from Europe. This is one of the main planks in Germany's long-range policy and we ought on no account to play the German game, which would be fatal for us and Europe in general for the reasons which I have enlarged upon in previous minutes. It seems quite unnecessary to call Italy in. If she was brought in it would be essential to bring in Russia too. Russia after all, has just as much right to be interested in the eight million Slavs as Germany to be interested in the three and a half million Germans. Moreover, Russia is in certain contingencies the ally of Czechoslovakia, and there would be no possible excuse for keeping her out of consultation if Italy were included. The simplest thing, therefore, would be to have neither Russia nor Italy, but if Italy were in, Russia must be too.⁸¹

Upon which Halifax commented, "There is great force in this."⁸²

As hopes for the success of the Runciman mission became increasingly remote, the idea of a four Power settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem once again came to the fore in the Foreign Office and in the Cabinet. Mallet⁸³ made the following comments on a possible Four Power conference in a minute of August 13th 1938. "It is perhaps a hopeful sign that both Herr von Ribbentrop and Herr von Dirksen should have this idea

⁸¹ Minute by Vansittart, July 22nd 1938. PRO, F0371/21730, C7375/1941/18. Vansittart expressed similar sentiments to Dalton two months earlier. Dalton wrote: "But he was very anxious that we should not cold-shoulder the Russians, nor drive them into isolation." Dalton, No.19, April 12th 1938. Vansittart had been 'promoted' to the position of Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the Foreign Secretary, on January 1st 1938, a post with no influence. For the decline in Vansittart's influence, see, Gilbert and Gott, "The Appeasers", p.79. Middlemas, "Diplomacy of Illusion", pp.76, 78.

⁸² Minute by Halifax, July 22nd 1938. PRO, F0371/21730, C7375/1941/18. Halifax's approval of Vansittart's minute seems to have had little effect on British foreign policy during the September of 1938.

⁸³ V.A.L.Mallet, Counsellor at the Foreign Office.

in mind."⁸⁴ Two weeks later another minute by Mallet stated that it would be best to pressure Czechoslovakia into giving up the Sudeten area rather than to let Germany go to war and take all Bohemia by force. A four Power conference he suggested, would ease the path to putting of pressure on the Czechoslovakian Government.⁸⁵

This idea was the essence of the Munich Agreement, although the discussions at Munich did not conform to the more usual conception of an international conference. The Soviet Union was to play no part in these deliberations. A British Cabinet meeting of September 13th came to the conclusion that the proposal was unlikely to prove fruitful or attractive to Germany, "except in so far as it involved the exclusion of Russia."⁸⁶ When the question of the proposed guarantee to Czechoslovakia (after the cession of the Sudetenland), was raised, the Cabinet decided that from the point of view of the effect on public opinion, Soviet participation in such a guarantee was desirable. It was agreed that France would inform Russia that she was modifying the terms of the Franco-Czechoslovakian alliance, and would invite Russia to do likewise.⁸⁷ Sargent's note stating that the Soviet Union should definitely be included in any proposed guarantee of Czechoslovakia was discussed,⁸⁸ but as Wilson⁸⁹ said at a

⁸⁴ Minute by Mallet, August 13th 1938. PRO,FO371/21731, C8301/1941/18.

⁸⁵ Minute by Mallet, August 27th 1938. PRO,FO371/21731, C8820/1941/18.

⁸⁶ See, CAB, 27/646, September 13th 1938.

⁸⁷ See, CAB, 27/646, September 20th 1938.

⁸⁸ See, CAB, 27/646, September 21st 1938. Sir Orme Sargent, Assistant Under Secretary of State.

⁸⁹ Sir Horace John Wilson, Chief Industrial Adviser to the Government, 1930-39: Seconded to the Treasury for service with the Prime Minister, 1935-39. Described by Gilbert and Gott Chamberlain's 'eminence grise', "The Appeasers", p.65.

meeting of Ministers immediately after Munich, "Russia had not been mentioned in the course of the Munich discussions." ⁹⁰

The question of the sincerity of the Soviet assurances that Russia would go to the aid of Czechoslovakia, is open to discussion. But at the time this was of no relevance, for the British and French Governments had no inclination whatsoever to act in concert with the Soviet Union, a country which they regarded as being militarily unreliable and politically untrustworthy. ⁹¹

The Soviet Government was doubtless unaware of the actual details of Anglo-French intentions during and immediately preceeding the talks at Munich, but it was neither ignorant of the trend of Western policy, nor of the significance of Munich for its policy of collective security. The exclusion of the USSR from the Munich negotiations was the culmination of a series of setbacks which had befallen collective security since the brief success at Nyon. Moscow's attempts to initiate an international conference on the Czechoslovakian problem, a means of securing at least some measure some Soviet participation in any settlement, had all been ignored.

As far as Moscow was concerned, Munich was nothing less

⁹⁰ CAB, 27/646, October 1st 1938. For the text of the Munich Agreement, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.II, No.1224.

⁹¹ A Secret Service report of September 18th, wrote thus of the Soviet Union: "We can never bank on this country, but to keep on the right side of this devil, we must sup with him to some extent, adapting the length of our spoon to the circumstances at any given moment." S.I.S. Memorandum, September 18th 1938. PRO, FO371/21659, C14471/42/18. For details of the French Government's strategic thinking during the Munich period, see, R.J.Young, "French Policy and the Munich Crisis of 1938: A Reappraisal", The Canadian Historical Association - Historical Papers 1970, (Winnipeg, 1970), pp.186-206.

than the Four Power Pact,⁹² the creation of which had been Russia's principal fear ever since its first appearance in 1933. As such, the Munich Agreement is often seen as the turning point in Soviet foreign policy, after which the now discredited concept of collective security was abandoned in favour of an accommodation with Germany. Certainly the Soviet Government had strong grounds for assuming that London and Paris were interested in neither joint action nor joint consultation with the USSR. Moscow had seen the democracies consistently giving way before the demands of the aggressive nations, to the detriment of their own international economic, political and strategic position. In this most recent example at Munich, France had chosen to ignore the Franco-Soviet and Franco-Czechoslovakian Pacts and instead, with Britain, gave Hitler the key to Czechoslovakia and Central Europe. Stalin was entitled to deduce from these actions that the Governments of Britain and France were either startlingly inept, or that some deeper plan was afoot, namely the diversion of the German threat to the East.

Moscow took steps to disassociate the Soviet Union from the events at Munich. Press rumours that Daladier had been empowered to speak for the USSR at Munich, were denied by a TASS communiqué issued on October 2nd.⁹³ Two days later another communiqué denied reports that the Soviet Union had been kept

⁹² See, Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.89. Chamberlain's visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden had been taken by the Soviet press as a preparation for the creation of a new "Four Power Pact." See, Pravda, September 17th 1938. Izvestia, September 16th 1938. Potemkin told Schulenburg on September 29th that, "what was happening now was the rebirth of the "notorious" Four Power Pact, which wanted to force its will on Europe." DGFP, Series D, Vol.II, No.667, p.998-999. Memorandum by Schulenburg, September 29th 1938.

⁹³ See, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.9. TASS Communiqué, October 2nd 1938.

regularly informed of the situation.⁹⁴ Soviet reaction to the Munich Agreement was predictably hostile,⁹⁵ the following comments from "Istoriya diplomatii" being typical:

Not only Czechoslovakia's death warrant was signed at Munich. At Munich Hitler was also given an advance on the aim of encouraging German aggression in Eastern Europe against the USSR....

At Munich, on September 30th 1938 was committed one of the most infamous acts of open banditry in international politics. Europe took another step towards war.⁹⁶

According to Coulongre, shortly after Munich, Potemkin commented, "My poor friend, what have you done? As for us I do not see any other outcome than a fourth partition of Poland."⁹⁷ These words grew in significance after the conclusion of the Nazi-Soviet pact. Yet Soviet policy did not undergo a radical change after Munich. There seemed instead to follow a period of watchful isolation. Litvinov told Coulongre on October 16th,

Henceforth the USSR has only to watch, from the shelter of its frontiers, the establishment of German hegemony over the centre and south-east of Europe. And if by chance the Western Powers finally decide to wish to stop it, they must

⁹⁴ See, *ibid.*, No.13. TASS Communiqué, October 4th 1938.

⁹⁵ See for example, *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, October 4th 1938. *Pravda* noted that one of the results of the Munich crisis was the enhancement of the international prestige of the USSR, "the only country whose policy was directed towards general peace and the independence and freedom from fascist aggression, of all nations."

⁹⁶ Gromyko, "Istoriya diplomatii", Vol.III, pp.740-742. For a recent Soviet account of the events leading up to the Munich Agreement, based on Czech and Soviet archival material, see, I.A.Peters, "SSSR, Chekhoslovakiya i evropeiskaya politika nakanune Myunkhena", (Kiev, 1971). Soviet works are as numerous on Munich as they are scarce on the Nazi-Soviet pact. A selection will be found in the bibliography.

⁹⁷ R. Coulongre, "De Staline à Hitler; Souvenirs de deux ambassades", (Paris, 1950), p.165.

address themselves to us, for ...we shall have
our word to say.⁹⁸

In London, Maisky spoke along similar lines to the Webbs,⁹⁹
and to Hugh Dalton, who wrote:

Maisky said that he did not think that the Soviet Government would for the present do anything dramatic. They would wait for a month or so and watch developments. The Franco-Soviet Pact was now not worth twopence, but it would probably be better not to denounce it since this would further encourage Hitler.¹⁰⁰

At the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU on March 10th 1939,
Stalin had stated:

We stand for peace and the strengthening of business relations with all countries. That is our position; and we shall adhere to this position so long as these countries maintain like relations with the Soviet Union, and so long as they make no attempt to trespass on the interests of our country.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.171. See also the Soviet account of this conversation "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.21. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the French Ambassador to the USSR, October 16th 1938. Schulenburg and Tippleskirch also expected no fundamental change in Soviet policy after Munich, though conditions were thought favourable for improved economic relations with the USSR. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.IV, Nos.476-480.

⁹⁹ "He thought that the USSR would be cautious and discreet in her policy: she would tend to withdraw from world affairs in effect; meanwhile staying at Geneva awaiting a "change of heart" in the democratic powers." Webb, Vol.52, October 31st 1938. p.147.

¹⁰⁰ Dalton, No.19, October 11th 1938. See also, B.H.Liddell Hart, "The Liddell Hart Memoirs", (London, 1965), Vol.II, p.222. Harold Nicolson records that at a lunch at the Soviet Embassy on February 9th, Maisky hinted that if Britain "made approaches, we should not find Russia as aloof or offended as we might have supposed." N.Nicolson, ed., "Harold Nicolson, Diaries and Letters, 1930-39", p.391. Maisky may have been aiming this hint at Boothby, who was also present, recalling the part which Boothby had played in the events of September 23rd 1938.

¹⁰¹ Degras, Vol.III, p.321.

However, even after the events of 1938, the Soviet Government had not abandoned its public posture of favouring collective measures against any further aggression, although it seems that the last Soviet appeal for an international conference, on March 18th 1939, was made as the result of a misinterpretation of British intentions.

On March 15th 1939, German troops entered Prague, and 'Czechia' was proclaimed a protectorate of the Third Reich.¹⁰² The Munich Agreement and the Anglo-French guarantees to Czechoslovakia were thus no longer in operation. On March 18th Britain and France delivered the appropriate protests in Berlin.¹⁰³

The Soviet Government informed Germany of its position in a note handed to the German Ambassador in Moscow by Litvinov on March 18th:

In view of the aforementioned the Soviet Government cannot recognize the inclusion of Czechia in the German Reich, nor in one form or another does Slovakia correspond to the universally recognized norms of international law and justice, nor to the principle of self-determination of peoples. In the opinion of the Soviet Government, the actions of the German Government not only have not removed a threat to general peace, but, on the contrary have created and strengthened such a threat, have destroyed the political stability of Central Europe, have reinforced those elements already creating a state of alarm in Europe and have dealt a blow to the feeling of security of nations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.IV, No.246.

¹⁰³ For the text of the British protest, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.308. Halifax to Henderson, March 17th 1938. For details of the French protest, see, "The French Yellow Book", No.78. Coulondre to Bonnet, March 18th 1939. Coulondre took up his post as Ambassador in Berlin in November 1938. Germany rejected both protests, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, No.46.

¹⁰⁴ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.157. Note from the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs USSR to the German Ambassador to the USSR, March 18th 1939. See also, L.N.Ivanov, "Ocherki mezhdunarodnikh otnoshenii v period vtoroi mirovoi voini", (Moscow, 1951), p.15.

Thus the Soviet position was officially consistent with its earlier attitude. In Moscow, however, Schulenburg¹⁰⁵ and Tippelskirch saw Litvinov's note in a slightly different light:

The Note gives the impression, moreover, that the method, more than the result is criticised....

After the Austrian Anschluss, Litvinov proposed an international conference but transmitted no Note. This time the Soviet Government express their point of view by means of a Note, but in a manner which relieves them of the necessity for further moves (for instance the recall of the Soviet Ambassador to report).¹⁰⁶

The British Government appears to have undergone something of a shock following Hitler's deliberate breaking of the Munich Agreement.¹⁰⁷ Britain was now anxious to take measures against any further German expansion, which was felt to be imminent. Virgil Tilea, the Roumanian Minister in London, played an important part in the subsequent events,¹⁰⁸ which led to a brief flowering of Russian hopes that collective action might now be within sight.

On March 16th, Tilea saw Sargent at the Foreign Office and told him that he expected Roumania to be Hitler's next

¹⁰⁵ See DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, No.50, pp.52-55. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, March 20th 1939. Schulenburg's impression, "based on Litvinov's manner and the second paragraph of the Soviet Note, is that the Soviet Government will also from now on not act independently but will be guided by the attitude of Great Britain, France, and the United States." Ibid., No.43, p.47. Schulenburg to the Foreign Ministry, March 19th 1939.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., No.51, pp.55-56. Tippelskirch to Senior Counsellor Schliep, March 20th 1939. Tippelskirch also saw the possibility of closer Russo-German economic relations. Eubank claims that the Soviet Union "had merely gone through the motions of a complaint. This was for the record." Eubank, "Munich", p.265.

¹⁰⁷ See, Gilbert and Gott, "The Appeasers", pp.229-241.

¹⁰⁸ Dirksen, the German Ambassador to Britain commented: "The press dished up to its readers sensational reports of an impending invasion of Rumania. Thanks to German-Rumanian trade agreement, plus an intrigue by the Rumanian Ambassador Tilea in London, the conviction of Government and public was aroused that the German expansion to the southeast was imminent." Dirksen, "Moscow, Tokyo, London", p.217. See also, Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.102.

target, and asked, "speaking entirely personally", how far his country "could count upon Great Britain."¹⁰⁹ On the next day Tilea saw Halifax and informed him that Germany had virtually given an ultimatum to his Government to the effect that Germany would guarantee Roumania's frontiers in return for what amounted to total economic subservience to Germany.¹¹⁰ Tilea then asked that,

His Majesty's Government should consider with all urgency whether they could give a precise indication of the action they would take in the event of Roumania being the victim of German aggression. If it was possible to construct a solid block of Great Britain and France it was to be expected that the situation might be saved.

Halifax promised to put the question "with all urgency" before the Prime Minister and Government.¹¹¹

On the same day, Maisky was invited to take tea with Aras, the Turkish Ambassador. When he arrived he found the Greek envoy and Tilea were also present. In Maisky's report to Litvinov, Tilea informed him that,

about a week ago, still before the seizure of Czechoslovakia, the German Government, through Wohltat, at present based in Roumania in connection with talks concerning the granting of oil prospecting rights, presented the Roumanian Government with an ultimatum. Wohltat stated that if Roumania halted the development of her industry and after a certain period of time, to be agreed with the Germans, closed down a part of her currently operating industrial enterprises, and if in addition, Roumania agreed to send all 100% of her exports to Germany, then the latter would be prepared to guarantee Roumania's frontiers. The Roumanian Government rejected Wohltat's ultimatum.

¹⁰⁹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.VI, No.298. Minute by Sargent, March 16th 1939.

¹¹⁰ For details of the German-Roumanian economic negotiations, see, DGFP, Series D, Vol.V, Nos.147,155,201,212,218,228,231, 234,235,236,257,264,282,293,294,309. The economic treaty which was signed between the two countries on March 23rd 1939, effectively made Roumania an agricultural and oil-producing satellite of Germany. For the text of the Agreement, see, *ibid.*, Vol.VI, No.78. For details of the Roumanian side of the negotiations, see, Moisuc, "Orientation dans la politique extérieure de la Roumanie après le pacte de Munich", Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, (Bucharest, 1967), V, 2, pp.328-340.

¹¹¹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.395. Halifax to Hoare, March 17th 1939. Sir Reginald Hoare, British Minister in Roumania.

However yesterday Wohltat had presented the same ultimatum in a still more menacing form. In connection with this, the Roumanian Government had urgently instructed Tilea to speedily inform the British Government of the situation thus created, and to ascertain upon what assistance on the part of Britain it could count. Today Tilea saw Halifax, Cadogan and Vansittart. Halifax promised to put the question before the Government and to give an answer within 2-3 days.¹¹²

Tilea had thus directly informed Britain of the threat to his country, and more indirectly had given the same information to the Soviet Union. On March 17th, Halifax had instructed Seeds in Moscow to ask whether the USSR was prepared to give active help to Roumania.¹¹³ It seems probable that this flurry of diplomatic activity led the Soviet Government to consider that Britain might be ready for further approaches on the lines of previous conference proposals.

A conversation between Maisky and Vansittart on March 17th, no doubt strengthened these impressions.

...Vansittart is an advocate of cooperation between Britain and the USSR in the cause of rebuffing Hitlerite aggression. Recognizing that "the foreign policy of the Prime Minister had completely collapsed", Vansittart asserted that the annexation of Czechoslovakia was its 'final blow' and therefore "the policy of appeasement was dead and its resurrection was no longer possible."

Vansittart went on to review the question of the possible direction of future Hitlerite aggression. "Memel and Danzig are obviously under direct threat, but at present they were trifles. He, Vansittart, considered it very probable that the next main objective of Hitler's aggressive actions was Roumania. However, whatever Hitler's direct plans, of one thing there was no doubt; the expansion of Germany could only be halted by means of the rapid creation of a bloc comprising Britain, France and the USSR with the inclusion of all other states under the threat of German aggression, such as Poland, Roumania and Scandinavia." "The trouble in 1938 was," he said, "that Hitler rained blows on an uncoordinated and unprepared Europe. If in 1939 we wish to stand against German

¹¹² "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.155. Telegram from Polpred USSR in Great Britain to Narkomindel USSR, March 17th 1939.

¹¹³ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.389. Halifax to Seeds, March 17th 1939. Sir William Seeds, British Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

aggression, Europe must be united and prepared. The first step in this must be a rapprochement between London, Paris and Moscow, to work out common plans of action in advance, and not at the moment of crisis." As subsequent events demonstrated, Vansittart's remarks reflected his personal views, and not the position of the British Government.

In answer to Vansittart, the Polpred pointed out that he was fully aware of Vansittart's train of thought, however, as Vansittart must know very well, "London and Paris had themselves systematically sabotaged any collective rebuff of the aggressors." Vansittart was in complete agreement with this statement.¹¹⁴

On the next day, March 18th 1939, Maisky saw Halifax, who informed him of the approach of the Roumanian Government and its request concerning the extent of possible British assistance in the event of German aggression. Halifax continued,

that he had asked Tilea, to what extent Roumania could count on the help of her neighbours. Tilea replied that the Roumanian Government was assured of the aid of Poland and the Balkan Entente, but on the question of the USSR he could say nothing definite. Halifax had promised Tilea an immediate discussion of the question in the British Government and would give him an answer afterwards. However, before taking its decision the British Government wished to clarify the position of the USSR with regard to this question. He was interested to know whether Roumania could count on the aid of the USSR in the event of German aggression, in what form and on what scale (i.e. would it be only the supply of arms and ammunition and so on, or more active military support). Yesterday he had sent Seeds urgent instructions to find out about this question, but felt it necessary to let me know about it as well. Then referring among other things, to my conversation of yesterday with Vansittart, Halifax showed interest in what I personally thought about the possibility of such assistance. I referred to comrade Stalin's speech, stressing that the practical aspect of a general principle depended upon the actual conditions in each case. Halifax asked me to ascertain how the Soviet Government saw the question of assistance to Roumania and to let him know. Halifax incidentally expressed the view that a German attack on Roumania was a matter of a few days, though such an attack would require a series of preparatory steps with regard to Hungary (even if she agrees to the passage of German troops). I replied that, despite the German ultimatum to Roumania, I was far from believing that Hitler in fact wished to go East.

¹¹⁴ Arkhiv vneshnei politiki SSSR (AVP SSSR), quoted in "SSSR v bor'be za mir", Notes, 83, p.679. This conversation does not appear to have been recorded in British Foreign Office Archives. Vansittart told Dalton, on March 24th, that he had seen Maisky "last week" and that he thought the Russians were now "very willing to come in" Dalton, No. 20, March 24th 1939.

This ultimatum could well have another interpretation - to put at Germany's disposal all the natural resources of Roumania, especially the oil, just in order to turn the main attack to the West.¹¹⁵

In Moscow, on March 18th 1939, Seeds and Litvinov exchanged views. Litvinov asked Seeds what was the British attitude to the 'fait accompli' in Czechoslovakia,¹¹⁶ while Seeds told Litvinov of Tilea's visit to Halifax and enquired as to the position of the USSR:

Today the British Ambassador requested an urgent meeting. The Roumanian envoy had officially informed Halifax of the German ultimatum and had asked what would be the position of the British Government in the event of an attack on Roumania. Before giving an answer to Roumania, Halifax decided to ascertain the positions of Moscow and Paris. I answered that my Government might also feel the need to know the position of other states, especially that of Britain, before giving an answer to Seeds' enquiry, for Halifax's query contains no indications on this score. I also expressed surprise that our assistance interested Britain, but not Roumania, who had not been in touch and perhaps did not even want it.¹¹⁷

On the evening of the same day, Litvinov informed Seeds of the Soviet Government's proposal for an international conference to deal with the threat to Roumania:

Late this evening I called Seeds and informed him that we proposed the immediate calling of a meeting of the representatives of the USSR, Britain, France, Poland and Roumania. I explained that nothing would come of the questions of one government to another concerning the position of each, and therefore a general consultation was essential. The venue of the conference was not important, but ideally it would meet in Roumania, thus immediately strengthening her position. Seeds stated that he had only just received a copy of a telegram, sent to London by the British envoy in Bucharest, which requested that all action be halted. Seeds does not understand what this means and thinks

¹¹⁵ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.160. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 18th 1939.

¹¹⁶ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.403. Seeds to Halifax, March 18th 1939.

¹¹⁷ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.161. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpreds USSR in Britain and France, March 18th 1939.

Seeds was correct in his assumption, for on March 18th, Gafencu, the Roumanian Foreign Minister had informed Hoare in Bucharest, that Tilea had, "misrepresented the situation". Roumania had not been threatened with a German ultimatum, and trade relations between the two countries were on a completely normal footing. Hoare added, with reference to Tilea's actions, that he realized "the enormity of his blunder."¹¹⁹ On March 19th, Gafencu told Hoare in confidence that he had given Tilea "a tremendous head washing" and had instructed him to report back to Bucharest once the French President's visit

¹¹⁸ Ibid., No.162. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpreds USSR in Britain and France, March 18th 1939. Hoare's telegram reached Seeds four hours after his first meeting with Litvinov. See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No. 421. Seeds to Halifax, March 18th 1939. Seeds reported that, "On seeing him again at 10.p.m. I said that some misunderstanding seemed to have arisen as His Majesty's Minister, Bucharest, had asked that action on Roumanian Minister's démarche in London was (sic? should be) suspended but that pending instructions from Your Lordship I did not know whether the matter had merely lost urgency or had perhaps been exaggerated. M.Litvinov said that the Soviet Ambassador in London had meanwhile telegraphed repeating news of ultimatum, which he had received from the Roumanian Minister and he (M.Litvinov) wondered whether Sir. R. Hoare's telegram meant that the Roumanian Government had acquiesced in German demands." For Maisky's account of these exchanges, see, Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.102.

¹¹⁹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.399. Hoare to Halifax, March 18th 1939.

was over.¹²⁰ Moscow had at this point, had no news of the Roumanian démenti and Litvinov sent instructions to Maisky in London and Surits in Paris, stating that he considered it essential to include Turkey in the proposed conference, and for Surits to inform Bonnet of the Anglo-Soviet exchange of views.¹²¹

Maisky saw Halifax on March 19th, and informed him of the Soviet reply to the British enquiry of March 18th. Halifax had already received an answer from Seeds, transmitting Litvinov's proposal of an international conference,¹²² but

¹²⁰ Ibid., No.431. Hoare to Halifax, March 19th 1939. See also, DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, No.42, p.46 . Kordt to the Foreign Ministry, March 19th 1939. Kordt, the Chargé at the German Embassy wrote that Tilea had been given a very severe reprimand by Gafencu and "after a lengthy and vehement telephone call has been instructed to issue a démenti." According to Moisuc, whose study is based on Roumanian archival material, Gafencu had instructed Tilea on March 17th, to inform Halifax immediately, that Roumania was threatened by German invasion. Moisuc, "Orientation dans la politique extérieure de la Roumanie après le pacte de Munich", Revue Roumaine d'Histoire, V, 2, p.336. Gafencu, on April 15th, noted that the signing of the economic treaty with Germany had "for the moment" eased the German pressure on Roumania. See, *ibid.*, p.337. Gafencu himself does not mention Tilea's activities, though he describes the signing of the treaty with Germany as "the only way to avoid certain contingencies which would have weighed heavily on Roumania's policy and friendships." G.Gafencu, "The Last Days of Europe", (London, 1947), p.25.

¹²¹ See, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.163. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpreds USSR in Britain and France, March 19th 1939.

¹²² DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.421. Seeds to Halifax, March 18th 1939.

according to Maisky's report to Moscow, Seeds appeared to have omitted some details for the sake of brevity, notably Litvinov's comments on "the length and complexity of negotiations between the different capitals, which were news to him (Halifax)".¹²³

Halifax announced that he had already been in consultation with the Premier on the question of your proposed conference, and that they had come to the conclusion that such an action would be premature, for it would be dangerous to call a conference without being sure of its success. Therefore for the present, as a first step they wished to propose to us, France, and Poland, the publication of a joint declaration along the lines that all the Powers named were concerned with the preservation of the integrity and independence of the states of East and South-east Europe. The exact text of the draft would be worked out, put before the Cabinet today, and probably would be communicated to us tomorrow. Halifax emphasised the importance of publishing the declaration as quickly as possible. He saw the next step thus: Turkey, Roumania, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and other supposedly peace loving states would be invited to associate themselves with the declaration, in connection with which would be a possible conference of all the named Powers together with original four.¹²⁴

In his record of the conversation with Maisky, Halifax made it clear that while he sympathized with Litvinov's proposal,

At the same time we were sensible of two difficulties in the proposal that M.Litvinov had made. First, we could hardly in present circumstances manage to send a responsible Minister to take part in the conference, and, if this were not possible, the desired advantage in the way of quick decision would not, in fact be obtained. Secondly, and perhaps more important, we thought that to hold such a conference as M.Litvinov suggested without a certainty that it would be successful was dangerous....

He (Maisky) did ask me whether we should rule out

¹²³ There seems to have been a slight misunderstanding over this point as Halifax had stated, "we certainly had no wish to waste time in prolonged and argumentative diplomatic exchanges" Ibid., No.433. Halifax to Seeds. March 19th 1939.

¹²⁴ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.164. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 19th 1939. Halifax further expanded upon his reasons for rejecting the proposal of a conference, at a meeting of Ministers on March 19th at 4.30 p.m. See, PRO, FO371/22967, C3859/15/8. See also, Meeting of Dominion High Commissioners, March 22nd 1939. PRO, FO371/22968, C4415/15/18. Among Halifax's reasons was a fear of telephone tapping in the event of a conference being called.

the idea of a conference, to which I replied that I should certainly not rule it out, but that I thought it was desirable to make further progress, as I thought we might expect to do more rapidly by the method I had outlined, before attempting to decide whether or not the conference procedure would be appropriate at a later stage.¹²⁵

The Soviet Government was informed of the non-existence of the German ultimatum in this same conversation between Maisky and Halifax. Despite the British view that the Soviet proposal for an international conference was premature, Maisky at least, had not yet lost hope that something concrete might result from the aftermath of the false alarm. He noted Halifax's approval of the tone of the Soviet note to the German Government on the occasion of the annexation of Czechoslovakia, and stressed the unusual activity of the British Government:

Despite the fact that the question of the reality of the German ultimatum is still not clear, the British Government is apparently seriously discussing the future direction of its foreign policy. This fact might serve as proof, that despite the sacred 'weekend' the Cabinet has been sitting almost without a break: one meeting was yesterday, Saturday, after lunch, the second - this morning and the third began at four this afternoon.¹²⁶

The Narkomindel did not accept in its entirety the Roumanian denials of the German ultimatum episode, as was shown by Litvinov's telegrams to the Soviet representatives in Britain, France and Roumania. The Roumanian envoy to the USSR, N. Dianu, denied the existence of the ultimatum, but Litvinov thought otherwise:

¹²⁵ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.433. Halifax to Seeds, March 19th 1939.

¹²⁶ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.165. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 19th 1939. Maisky telegraphed his report of the conversation with Halifax in two sections. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.432. Halifax to Seeds, March 19th 1939.

It is to be supposed that either Germany has induced Roumania to issue this denial, shelving the ultimatum for the time being, or Roumania has decided to give in to German pressure.¹²⁷

Nor was Litvinov optimistic about the apparent change of heart in the British Government. The Soviet proposal for an international conference had been considered premature, and instead London was giving priority to the British idea of a four Power declaration, after which a conference might be contemplated. In a letter to Maisky of March 19th 1939, Litvinov noted the effect of the annexation of Czechoslovakia on public opinion in France and Britain, but pointed out that,

if Hitler made no new expansionist moves, or even made some new peaceful gesture, Chamberlain and Daladier would once more begin to speak in defence of the Munich line. They have still by no means given up. Therefore never assume that the creation in government circles of a mood favouring cooperation with the USSR, is permanent.

Litvinov was equally sceptical about Hudson's visit to the USSR,¹²⁸ which he felt was unlikely to lead to any concrete political rapprochement between the two countries. He continued,

For five years, in the field of foreign policy, our concern has been to act and make suggestions concerning the organisation of peace and collective security, but the Powers have ignored them and acted contrary to them. If Britain and France are really changing their line, then let them either speak up about the proposal which we made earlier, or make their own suggestions. The initiative must be left with them. However, the reply I gave Seeds yesterday included a concrete proposal, which with some alterations might be suitable in other circumstances. The negotiations will thus probably be limited to a mutual exchange of assurances of readiness to cooperate, without any cooperation being initiated.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.166. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpreds USSR in Britain, France and Roumania, March 19th 1939.

¹²⁸ R.S.Hudson, Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, 1937-40. Hudson arrived in Moscow from Warsaw, in March 23rd 1939, for trade talks with the Soviet Government.

¹²⁹ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.167. Letter from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in Britain, March 19th 1939.

Moscow was well aware of the hostility of Roumania and Poland¹³⁰ to the USSR, and the probable effect of this on the chances of success of the British plan for a four Power declaration. Once the idea of an international conference had been shelved in favour of the declaration, it remained there indefinitely. The declaration itself, almost immediately encountered difficulties caused by Polish intransigence. Kennard reported to Halifax on March 20th, that Beck did not wish Poland to be associated with the declaration, lest Germany be alienated by what might seem to be a Polish move into a pro-Soviet, anti-German position.¹³¹ Two days later Beck repeated this view. He told Kennard that he would not allow Poland to be rushed into any commitment, and that if Russia, as proposed, was also to sign the declaration, then this would "definitely place Poland in the Soviet Camp". This, Beck felt, would have serious consequences for Polish-German relations.¹³² These unpromising signs from Warsaw did not, however, immediately put an end to the proposed declaration.

Seeds put the British proposals before Litvinov on March 21st. The British Ambassador assured Litvinov that the British plan was not a counter-proposal to that of the Soviet Union whose suggestion "had by no means been rejected." In reply to the Russian comment that various preliminary consultations would be necessary, Seeds said that, "the declaration would consist of non-binding phrases and would be so brief, that

¹³⁰ Litvinov told Seeds on March 20th, that he had inadvertently forgotten to name Turkey as a potential participant in the proposed conference. He thought that Turkey would be more willing to sign the declaration than Poland. See, *ibid.*, No.170. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in Britain, March 20th 1939.

¹³¹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.447. Kennard to Halifax, March 20th 1939.

¹³² *Ibid.*, No.489. Kennard to Halifax, March 22nd 1939.

stated that if Poland refused to sign, then he, personally, "saw no obstacles to a declaration coming from the three great Powers." Perhaps to ease Soviet disappointment, Seeds stressed that the declaration was to be the first stage, followed by the addition of the signatures of the smaller Powers. "The next stage", Seeds added, "might be a general meeting of the signatories of the declaration..."¹³³

The Soviet Government accepted the draft¹³⁴ of the British declaration on March 22nd 1939:

We share the position of the British Government and accept the formula of its draft declaration. The representatives of the Soviet Government will sign the declaration without delay, as soon as France and Poland have accepted the British proposal and have promised their signatures. In order to give this statement special solemnity and to make it binding, we propose that it be signed by the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all four Powers.

Litvinov was also anxious that the Balkan, Baltic and Scandinavian nations be invited to adhere to the declaration.¹³⁵

¹³³ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.176. Record of a Conversation between the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR and the British Ambassador to the USSR, March 21st 1939. It is interesting to note the difference of emphasis between Seeds's words to Litvinov and his report to Halifax: "I argued that the substance of the declaration was such that truly peace-loving Governments could not fail to subscribe to it and that any amendments would therefore be only slight and speedily settled." DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.461. Seeds to Halifax, March 21st 1939.

¹³⁴ "We the undersigned, duly authorised to that effect, hereby declare that, inasmuch as peace and security in Europe are matters of common interest and concern, and since European peace and security may be affected by any action which constitutes a threat to the political independence of any European state, our respective Governments hereby undertake immediately to consult together as to what steps should be taken to offer joint resistance to any such action." DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.446. Halifax to Seeds, Phipps and Kennard, March 20th 1939. See also, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.177.

¹³⁵ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.178. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpreds USSR in Britain and France, March 22nd 1939. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.490. Seeds to Halifax, March 22nd 1939.

Maisky emphasises the speed of the Russian response: "The Soviet Government again replied very rapidly. On March 22nd, Litvinov informed Seeds, and on March 23rd I informed Cadogan... that although the USSR considered this measure insufficiently effective, none the less it was ready to sign the declaration as soon as France and Poland did so."¹³⁶

In his conversation with Maisky on March 23rd, Cadogan pointed out that Poland had not yet replied to the proposal of a four Power declaration, and that Warsaw was being rather evasive, he would "of course keep closely in touch."¹³⁷ Moscow chose this moment to make it clear that despite foreign press reports, the USSR had not promised to aid Poland or Roumania in the event of any attack. On March 22nd TASS issued this communiqué:

The foreign press has been spreading rumours to the effect that the Soviet Government recently proposed to Poland and Roumania its aid in case they became the victims of aggression. TASS is authorised to declare that this does not correspond to reality. Neither Poland nor Roumania appealed to the Soviet Government for aid or informed the Soviet Government of any danger threatening them. It is true that on March 18th, the British Government, having informed the Soviet Government that there were serious reasons for fearing an act of violence against Roumania, enquired as to the possible position of the Soviet Government in such an eventuality. In reply to this enquiry the Soviet Government proposed the calling of a conference of the representatives of the most interested states, namely Great Britain, France, Poland, Roumania, Turkey and the USSR. Such a conference in the opinion of the Soviet Government, would give the best possibility for the clarifying of the real situation and the ascertaining of the position of each of the participants. The British Government, however, believed this proposal to be premature.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.106.

¹³⁷ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.552. Halifax to Seeds, March 28th 1939. See also, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.182. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 23rd 1939.

¹³⁸ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.179. TASS Communiqué, March 22nd 1939. On March 23rd 1939, Pravda warned Great Britain and France that unless they showed more devotion to collective security, Soviet suspicions of the democracies would be aggravated.

The reasons prompting Moscow both to issue the communiqué, and to accept the proposed declaration, only on the condition that France and Poland¹³⁹ had promised their signatures, was a Soviet desire to demonstrate that the Soviet Union had not been the prime mover behind this series of diplomatic exchanges. The Soviet Government knew that neither Poland nor Roumania desired Soviet aid, and sensed perhaps that its idea of a conference, not to mention the four Power declaration itself, was becoming increasingly less of a reality. Moscow hoped to disassociate itself from a probable failure while making what capital it could out of the situation.

On March 22nd, Anglo-French Conversations in London revealed that Soviet apprehensions were well founded. Bonnet and Chamberlain decided that in view of Polish reluctance to be associated with a declaration involving the Soviet Union, and Roumanian hostility to Russia, other measures would have to be taken:

Lord Halifax said that he understood, therefore, that we were to proceed on the assumption that if Roumania were attacked, and offered resistance, and if Poland went to her assistance, Great Britain and France would both also join in giving assistance; and that the proposed approach to Poland and Roumania would be made by Great Britain and France simultaneously. It would, however, first be necessary to wait for the formal reply of the Polish Government (though not of the Soviet Government) to the approach that His Majesty's Government had made in regard to the declaration.

Mr. Chamberlain said that if the Polish reply, as was to be expected, was negative or evasive, the

¹³⁹ This condition seems to have disturbed the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, Grzybowski. See "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.188. Record of a Conversation between the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR and the Polish Ambassador to the USSR, March 25th 1939.

intention would not be to press them any further, but to try the new procedure now proposed.¹⁴⁰

The British Government next contacted Maisky on March 29th, when Cadogan informed Maisky that the Poles had refused to sign the declaration if the USSR was to be a co-signatory. Maisky enquired as to the meaning of Chamberlain's words in the House of Commons of the previous day, when the Prime Minister had said "that what the Government have in mind goes a great deal further than consultation." Cadogan explained that "In the circumstances His Majesty's Government were not pursuing the idea of a Four-Power declaration, and had been considering what other line they could take." Cadogan stated that although no decision had yet been taken, direct military assistance to Poland or Roumania was contemplated.

The Ambassador said that if His Majesty's Government adopted this course, it would be a revolutionary change in British policy and might have far-reaching results. It would increase enormously the confidence of other countries and might have a very great effect.

Maisky was told that he would no doubt be informed as soon as a firm decision had been taken.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.484. Record of an Anglo-French Conversation, March 22nd 1939. Halifax showed a little apprehension at the effects of the new plan on the USSR: "It would be unfortunate", he told Bonnet, "to give the Soviet Government the idea that we were pushing her to one side." Bonnet "thought it might be possible to explain the situation to M.Litvinov." Better still, suggested Corbin, "it would...be possible to say that we were in consultation with the Soviet Government." Franco-Soviet relations had been at a low ebb since Munich, see, Adamthwaite, "French Foreign Policy, April 1938 - September 1939, with special reference to the policy of M.Georges Bonnet", pp. 298-299. Maisky was aware of Bonnet's defeatist attitude during his visit to London on March 21st-22nd. See, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.190. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 26th 1939.

¹⁴¹ DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.565. Halifax to Seeds, March 29th 1939. See also, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.194. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 29th 1939.

Two days later, on March 31st, Halifax asked Maisky to see him at 1 p.m. Maisky told A.J. Sylvester, Lloyd George's private secretary, that Halifax had already postponed two previous appointments. Chamberlain was due to make a statement in the House at 11 a.m., and Maisky's initial appointment had been for 10.30 a.m. He told Sylvester that "from round about ways"¹⁴² he knew that Chamberlain's statement was likely to involve a definite military commitment

¹⁴² The "round about ways" to which Maisky alluded, refer not only to his meeting with Cadogan, but to an interview between Chamberlain and a joint T.U.C. - Labour Party delegation which took place on March 23rd. Chamberlain told this delegation, of which Dalton was a member, that the difficulties encountered with the Four-Power declaration were caused by Poland. He repeated the official British reasons for not proceeding with the original Soviet conference proposal, and described the new British plan for an Anglo-French-Polish pact with Roumania, involving possible Soviet attachment at a later date. For an account of this meeting, see, PRO, FO371/22967, C4317/15/18, March 23rd 1939. Dalton, No.20, March 23rd 1939. Dalton's record of the conversation makes Chamberlain sound rather less positive than the Foreign Office version. However, Maisky reported to Moscow that Chamberlain had told the delegation that the Government was preparing "serious measures". Despite Chamberlain's apparent change of attitude, Maisky was inclined to believe that the Prime Minister was averse to the idea of obligations in Eastern Europe, and still hoped "to divert Hitler to the East, against the USSR". "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.187. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 24th 1939. Maisky knew that Arthur Greenwood, the Labour M.P., had seen Chamberlain on the morning of March 30th, and that Chamberlain had been concerned enough about the supposed threat to Poland to call an urgent Cabinet meeting. See *ibid.*, No.198. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 30th, 1939. For further details, see, Dalton, No.20, March 30th 1939. Dalton saw Chamberlain on the same day. He urged the Prime Minister to postpone his statement until Maisky had seen Halifax at 10.30 a.m. This advice may have led to the postponement of Maisky's appointment and of Chamberlain's statement to the House.

to Poland. Maisky was thus irritated, both at the delay in seeing Halifax and at the ignorance in which the Foreign Office had kept him.¹⁴³

On seeing Maisky, Halifax apologised for the postponement of his earlier appointment and explained that he had been fully occupied with meetings of the Cabinet and the Foreign Policy Committee, and the drafting of the Prime Minister's statement which was now scheduled for 3 p.m. Halifax repeated Cadogan's statement of March 29th, that the project of a joint declaration had now been dropped as it no longer had any real chance of success. He then informed Maisky of the proposed guarantee to Poland. Maisky approved of the guarantee but said that he felt the wording was a little vague. Hitler might not interpret it in the way the Cabinet had intended. Halifax then asked if the Prime Minister might say that his statement had the approval of the Soviet Government, as it was wished to prevent "internal arguments and differences of opinion in Britain", so as to present a united front to Germany.¹⁴⁴ Maisky stated that he sympathised

¹⁴³ Sylvester wrote this account after meeting Maisky on Lloyd George's instructions, at 10 a.m. In view of Chamberlain's forthcoming statement in the House, Lloyd George wanted to know the latest position with regard to Anglo-Soviet contacts. No doubt with this in mind, Maisky somewhat exaggerated the real situation. He did mention his meeting with Cadogan on the 29th, but dismissed this as being devoted to "routine matters", and stated that "there was no sort of consultation at all. I have not seen Halifax since Sunday the 19th." Maisky continued by complaining that he had never been officially sent a copy of the draft declaration by the Foreign Office. He gave Sylvester the impression that he thought the declaration was still a possibility, despite the fact that Cadogan had told him otherwise two days earlier. "If you talk about good manners", Maisky concluded, "there are none". Lloyd George, G/13/, File on Russia, A.J. Sylvester to Lloyd George, March 31st 1939.

¹⁴⁴ In parentheses, Maisky noted that this was a veiled reference to the opposition's desire for closer Anglo-Soviet contacts.

with Halifax's intention, but, he added,

I could not agree to his suggestion. As far as I knew, the British Government had had consultations about the document with Paris and Warsaw, but not with Moscow. The text of the document was not known to the Soviet Government. Furthermore until this moment I had not seen it. No matter what our evaluation of the statement's intention might be, how could the Premier tell Parliament, under such circumstances, that the Soviet Government had given its blessing to his statement?

There followed a discussion concerning the extent to which Russia might be prepared to aid Poland or Roumania in the event of a German attack. Maisky stated that he was not in a position to comment on this save for a general comment that the USSR was always prepared to aid a victim of aggression. Halifax concluded with an expression of his desire for the maintainance of closer contacts with the Soviet Government.¹⁴⁵

The news of the British guarantee to Poland¹⁴⁶ marked the final rejection of both the Soviet conference proposal of March 18th, and the British counterproposal of a Four-Power declaration. From Moscow, Seeds reported Litvinov's displeasure. Whatever else may have taken place, Litvinov told Seeds,

the fact remained that in response to our approach Soviet Government had first suggested a six-Power Conference and secondly agreed to sign a four-Power declaration: each proposal had been summarily dropped. Now His Majesty's Government of their own initiative were engaged in a new plan of which he knew little. Soviet Government had had enough and would henceforward stand apart free of any commitments.¹⁴⁷

In his account of this interview, Litvinov stressed the coldness of his own attitude:

¹⁴⁵ See, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.200. Telegram from the Polpred USSR in Britain to the Narkomindel USSR, March 31st 1939. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.589. Halifax to Seeds, March 31st 1939. For details of the British decision see, Gilbert and Gott, "The Appeasers", pp. 234-236.

¹⁴⁶ For the text of Chamberlain's statement to the House of Commons on March 31st, see DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.582.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., No.597. Seeds to Halifax, April 1st 1939.

To Seeds, it was unpleasant to meet with such coldness on my part towards Chamberlain's statement, which in the Ambassador's opinion, deserved a better reception.

In fact I received the Ambassador very coldly, showing this by words rather than behaviour, and was not inclined to prolong the conversation.¹⁴⁸

Maisky explains the aims behind the initial decision to propose the calling of an international conference:

?/ The Soviet side was striving more than ever for the preservation of peace. It understood perfectly how close the peril of a second world war had come, and was ready to use any appropriate means to avert or at least postpone it. The Soviet side cherished no illusions. Recent experience had left behind only extreme distrust and initiation towards the British Government and particularly towards Chamberlain personally; but the Soviet side considered that in the sphere of international relations policy must be governed by reason and not by emotion. Hence the Soviet side, even after all the disappointments of the preceding years, thought it essential to try to bring about cooperation with Britain and France for resistance to the aggressors. The representatives of the Soviet side still nourished a faint hope that possibly the tragedy of Czechoslovakia had opened the eyes even of the Clivedenites to the danger of appeasing Hitler, a danger which threatened Britain herself, and that in view of this the Chamberlain Government might at long last agree to effective cooperation with the USSR in averting a second world war. And even if such a hope in the long run proved illusory, nevertheless it was necessary to try to come to an understanding with Chamberlain and Daladier. That was why the Soviet Government gave its reply with such phenomenal speed (the same day!) to the British Government's enquiry of March 18th, and made a proposal which testified to its readiness to take really effective steps against the danger looming over Rumania.¹⁴⁹

To Dalton, on March 28th, Maisky had explained that the Soviet Union had proposed a conference "in order to test British and French intentions, of which they were suspicious."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ "SSSR v bor'be za mir", No.203. Record of a Conversation of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR with the British Ambassador to the USSR, April 1st 1939.

¹⁴⁹ Maisky, "Who Helped Hitler?", p.103.

¹⁵⁰ Dalton, No.20, March 28th 1938.

The proposal of March 18th, thus had much in common with the earlier Soviet calls for an international conference of March 17th 1938, and September 23rd 1938. By confronting Britain and France with a clear choice of taking action in concert with the USSR, or of refusing to do so, Moscow could gauge the intentions of the West. If London and Paris rejected the Soviet proposal, the Soviet Union would draw its own conclusions, and denounce Britain and France for their weakness in the face of aggression. To this would be added the rider that the real intentions of the democracies were to divert Hitler to the East. This is what had taken place on the two previous instances and it was repeated in March 1939.

Where this episode differed from its predecessors, was that Britain had to some extent softened the blow of rejection by proposing the Four-Power declaration as an alternative, while suggesting that a conference might be held later.¹⁵¹ Moscow interpreted this as a deliberate British deception, but it appears more likely that it was merely the result of a British desire to move slowly, though there is no doubt that a firm agreement with Russia was, at this stage, not one of London's aims. Moscow itself could not refuse to participate in the proposed declaration, lest it be accused of the same type of recalcitrance for which London was so often the target of Soviet press attacks. While the Soviet Government was aware of Chamberlain's plan to abandon the idea of a Four-Power declaration and to substitute an Anglo-French guarantee of Poland, it could take no steps until officially informed of the

¹⁵¹ Chamberlain had informed the joint T.U.C. - Labour delegation, on March 23rd, that, "The suggestion of the Soviet Government that a Conference should be summoned forthwith of certain powers was not the outcome of His Majesty's Governments' approach but contemporaneous with the consideration of the question in this country." PRO, FO371/22967, C4317/15/18. This view is not borne out by a study of the relevant documents.

decision. Once the Foreign office had communicated their new plan to the Soviet Government, Moscow claimed, with some justification, that it had been ignored by the British Government.¹⁵²

Maisky made much of this in his conversations with Dalton¹⁵³ and Sylvester,¹⁵⁴ for he realised that British lack of contact with the USSR was a sensitive political issue¹⁵⁵ in the House of Commons. The root of the problem was, however, a profound difference of opinion between the British and Soviet conceptions of what was meant by contacts or consultation. Moscow expected, or hoped, to be at least notified, if not consulted, over each step following the British decision to substitute the Four-Power declaration for an international conference. For the Chamberlain Cabinet, on the other hand, even the extent of its contacts with the Soviet Union since March 18th had been something of a departure.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² The Foreign Office, privately at least, acknowledged that Maisky could have been more fully informed. See, Minutes by Strang, Cadogan and Halifax, April 3rd 1939. PRO,FO371/23016, C4575/54/18. See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.V, No.3. Halifax to Seeds, April 4th 1939. Halifax's explanation, intended for Litvinov, is not very convincing.

¹⁵³ See, Dalton, No.20, March 28th,30th, April 12th 1939.

¹⁵⁴ See, Lloyd George, G/13/ , File on Russia. A.J. Sylvester to Lloyd George, March 31st 1939. G/130/ , Box on Russia, March 31st 1939. Sir Archibald Sinclair, leader of the Liberal Party, wrote to Lloyd George on April 1st, and informed him that while it was true that Maisky's appointments with Halifax had been postponed, Maisky had not given Sylvester a full account of the meeting with Cadogan on March 29th. Sinclair had discussed the question of the Foreign Office's treatment of Maisky with Vansittart, Cadogan, Sir Osmund Cleverly (Chamberlain's private secretary) and with Maisky himself. See *ibid.*, G/18/4/9, Sir Archibald Sinclair to Lloyd George, April 1st 1939. For a version of these events more sympathetic to Maisky's point of view, see, Bilainkin, "Ivan Mikhailovitch Maisky", pp. 241-244.

¹⁵⁵ Maisky had told Dalton on March 28th, that "he thought Chamberlain (1) wanted to frighten Germany by some evidence of a rapprochement with the Soviet Union, though he did not seriously intend the latter, and (2) to meet the electoral argument that he was cold-shouldering Russia." Dalton, No.20, March 28th 1939.

¹⁵⁶ Close relations with the Soviet Union were not particularly welcomed by the Cabinet. See, CAB 27/624, March 27th 1939.

Hudson's visit to the USSR¹⁵⁷ was an example of this difference of approach between the Soviet Union and Great Britain. To the Soviet Government, trade negotiations invariably carried strong political implications, whereas to London they simply remained trade talks.¹⁵⁸ This was so difficult for Moscow to comprehend, that Russian disappointment with Britain's attitude was all the greater when no political conversations materialized during Hudson's stay, despite attempts by Litvinov to initiate such exchanges.¹⁵⁹

More fundamental, however, than a difference of approach to international problems, was the extreme distrust and hostility towards Russia felt by the major figures in the British Government. Chamberlain wrote to his sister, on March 26th 1939:

I must confess to the most profound distrust of Russia. I have no belief in her ability to maintain

¹⁵⁷ Hudson returned to London, via Helsinki and Stockholm, on April 4th. His visit was given very little coverage in the Soviet press, apart from the final communiqué, for which, see, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.593. For details of his talks with the Russians, see, *ibid.*, Nos. 505, 519, 531, 533 and 608.

¹⁵⁸ There is some evidence to show that Moscow expected the talks to be political in nature. Hudson had, according to Soviet Foreign Policy Archives, told Maisky before his departure that he was prepared to deal with any question, economic or political. See, "SSSR v bor'be za mir", Note No.92. p.681. Dalton recorded that "Maisky had been told before Hudson went, both by Hudson himself and by Vansittart, that the political aspect of the visit was even more important than trade. Halifax had said the same to Maisky, though more guardedly." Dalton, No.20, March 28th 1939. Halifax was anxious that the final communiqué should leave out references to international policy. See, *ibid.*, See also, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.IV, No.545. Seeds to Halifax, March 28th 1939. In this report, Seeds expressed his satisfaction at the final communiqué issued on Hudson's departure: "In fact communiqué presents a picture of what I would myself wish Anglo-Soviet relations to be, namely friendliness and contacts but no obligations."

¹⁵⁹ See "SSSR v bor'be za mir", Note No.94, p.682.

an effective offensive, even if she wanted to. And I distrust her motives, which seem to me to have little connection with our ideas of liberty, and to be concerned only with getting everyone else by the ears. Moreover she is both hated and suspected by many of the smaller states, notably by Poland, Roumania, and Finland.¹⁶⁰

Halifax's opinions were basically similar:

I gravely doubt whether anything that we or the French could have said or done in 1939 would have had the smallest effect in leading Russia to accept a position calculated to invite sharp and early reaction from the German side.¹⁶¹

These views were shared by many of the lesser officials of the Foreign Office including Cadogan¹⁶² and Oliphant.¹⁶³ A minute by Strang, commenting on Litvinov's attitude after receiving news of the Polish guarantee, sums up the Foreign Office position towards the Soviet Union:

This is a typical Soviet manoeuvre. The Soviet Government have attacked H.M.G. in the past for their failure to take up a definite attitude towards German aggressions. Now that H.M.G. have done so, the Soviet Government sit back and wash their hands of the whole affair. In spite of their professions in the past, and in spite of the stories they have fed to a too-credulous Left-Wing press in this country, the Soviet Government have not given (and I believe never will give) firm assurances of support to any other country....

However quite apart from the material difficulties, I am not sure that the Soviet Government would particularly wish to intervene in any war against Germany, unless they felt themselves immediately threatened. It would not be at all contrary to their

¹⁶⁰ Feiling, "The Life of Neville Chamberlain", p.403.

¹⁶¹ Halifax, "Fulness of Days" p.207. Halifax's attitude was, however, not as extreme as Chamberlain's. At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Conservative Party, on February 16th, he had stated that Britain should not ignore a population of 180,000,000 people. He described Russia as something between the "unconquerable steam roller" of 1914, and being entirely useless militarily. See, Lloyd George, G/23/18, A.J. Sylvester to Lloyd George, February 23rd 1939. Maisky heard of Halifax's attitude, see, Bilainkin, "Ivan Mikhailovitch Maisky", p.229. For further details of Halifax's attitude to the USSR in March 1939, see, Harvey, "The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey, 1937-40", p.268.

¹⁶² See, Minute by Cadogan, April 18th 1939, PRO,FO371/23063, C5430/3356/18.

¹⁶³ See, Minute by Oliphant, March 22nd 1939, PRO,FO371/23062, C3849/3356/18. For details of Foreign Office views on Fascism and Communism, see, D.Lammers, "Fascism, Communism and the Foreign Office, 1937-39", Journal of Contemporary History, 1971, Vol.6, No.3, pp.66-87.

desires to see Great Britain and France at grips with Germany and in process of destroying each other.¹⁶⁴

The Soviet Government's five proposals¹⁶⁵ for the calling of an international conference had all either been ignored or rejected by Britain and France. In their aim of assessing the attitude of these two Powers the Soviet proposals had, however, been successful, for both had demonstrated their reluctance to commit themselves to a policy of collective resistance¹⁶⁶ involving the USSR. Each proposal had in fact further accentuated the existing mistrust between Moscow and the Western democracies.¹⁶⁷ It was upon this basis that the unsuccessful Anglo-French-Soviet negotiations¹⁶⁸ began in April 1939.¹⁶⁹ The Soviet proposals had succeeded only in creating for the USSR the appearance of a position of moral superiority - a gain which proved to be shortlived.

¹⁶⁴ Minute by Strang, April 3rd 1939. PRO, FO371/23016, C4575/54/18. Middlemas states that "the British deliberately refused to envisage Russia as an ally, rebuffed what, on the evidence available, appear to have been genuine overtures and alienated the Soviet government so far that the negotiations of 1939 were crippled before they began." Middlemas, "Diplomacy of Illusion", p.453.

¹⁶⁵ March 17th, September 2nd, September 23rd, September 28th 1938; March 18th 1939.

¹⁶⁶ In the period of the negotiations following Germany's invasion of Czechoslovakia, Hitler also took Memel, on March 23rd, and Mussolini annexed Albania on April 7th.

¹⁶⁷ Tippelskirch in Moscow remarked upon the unusual Soviet mistrust of the Western Powers during this period. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, Nos, 112 and 161. See also, Pravda, April 4th 1939.

¹⁶⁸ For a detailed study of British policy towards the Soviet Union in this period, see, S.Aster, "British Policy towards the USSR and the Onset of the Second World War, March 1938 - August 1939", (Unpublished PhD. thesis, London University, 1969). For details of British suspicion of the USSR during the tri-partite negotiations, see, I. Colvin, "The Chamberlain Cabinet", (London, 1971), pp. 199-216.

¹⁶⁹ Stalin also began renewed approaches to Hitler in April 1939. See, DGFP, Series D, Vol.VI, No.215. pp 266-267. Memorandum by State Secretary Weizsäcker, April 17th 1939.

Conclusion.

In the 1930s the USSR was still considered by many to be a state unlike any other, having inherited the Marxist-Leninist doctrines of world revolution, symbolised by the existence of the Comintern, and all the other peculiarly Soviet political and Social institutions. What was not generally realised was Stalin's skill in maintaining the forms of his inheritance while radically changing their function. Just as he had transformed his own secretarial position, investing it with supreme power, he changed the Comintern and every other Soviet organisation into tools for the expression and implementation of his own policies. The perpetual Soviet references to peace, humanity, collective security and the heroic struggle of the Spanish, Chinese or Czechoslovak people, were the ritual lip-service paid to ideals which had perished, along with those whom Stalin considered to be his opponents, during his rise to power. Stalin was above all a realist, whose approach to international relations was a reflection of the methods he had employed in securing his pre-eminence in Soviet domestic politics.

The aim of Russian foreign policy in this period was thus first and foremost the preservation of the Soviet state. Given that isolation was virtually ruled out by the nature of all Soviet diplomatic activity since 1917, Stalin had two possible courses of action. He could associate the USSR with the Western democracies, or join with Nazi Germany. During the period 1933-1939 there were three loose groupings in existence, only one of which, the Fascist states, being in any way dynamic: "To the communists, fascism and democracy were just two forms

of the enemy capitalism. To the democracies, fascism and communism represented two faces of totalitarianism."¹

The policy of collective security which the Soviet Union adopted in 1933, represented a decision to join with the West in order to contain the twin threats of Japanese militarism and Nazi Germany. Moscow publicly maintained this policy until the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact on August 23rd, 1939. However, as is evident from documentary material, Russia's espousal of collective security did not prevent Stalin from making regular secret attempts to reach a political understanding with Hitler, no matter how much the Soviet press may have condemned National Socialism and German aggression. Collective security may have been a mere screen with which to conceal Stalin's real desire for an alliance with Germany, though it seems more probable, despite Krivitsky's assertions,² that Stalin was acting in the tradition of Soviet diplomacy by simultaneously pursuing two separate policies. Which of the two imperialist blocs the Soviet Union chose to ally with would be a choice made not on the basis of the ideologies of those blocs, but on an estimate of their potential value to the requirements of Soviet security. Stalin's intention may have been to maintain peace in Europe for as long as possible, hoping to avoid Russian involvement in any conflict by means of an arrangement with the more powerful of the two blocs. It is one of the paradoxes of Soviet foreign policy that Moscow's attitudes were often similar to those of a much smaller nation. Thus, if Stalin committed the USSR's enormous

¹ J. Duroselle, "Changes in Diplomacy since Versailles", in B. Porter, ed., "The Aberystwyth Papers - International Politics 1919-1969." (London, 1972), p.113.

² See, Krivitsky, "I was Stalin's Agent", pp.24-31.

geopolitical weight to one or other of the European blocs, this would tend to create a marked imbalance of power in international politics. It is possible, therefore, that Stalin's aim was to play the West off against Germany in order to create the maximum amount of tension between the two Capitalist groupings. Russia's eventual accommodation with Hitler in 1939, certainly guaranteed Germany's eastern flank, making war with Britain and France more likely. Although Stalin's behaviour in international affairs was always cautious, he no doubt believed the USSR to be militarily a match for anything other than a united capitalist coalition. His words in 1925 seem to hold as true for Soviet intentions then as they did for his actions between 1933-1939:

Our banner is still the banner of peace. But if war breaks out we shall not be able to sit with folded arms. We shall have to take action, but we shall be the last to do so. And we shall do so in order to throw the decisive weight in the scales, the weight that can turn the scales.³

In less than a year after the abandonment of collective security the USSR had annexed the eastern part of Poland, part of Karelia and the Finnish bases, Bessarabia, northern Bukovina, and the Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. At the end of March 1939 the Soviet Union was at the peak of its moral influence, but in the absence of sufficiently substantial rewards, Moscow was prepared to sacrifice this position in the interests of political security and territorial expansion.

It is in this context that the Soviet Conference Diplomacy of the period 1933-1939 must be set. Each of the four international conferences or committees in which the USSR participated, and those which it proposed, was directly

³ J.V.Stalin, Speech delivered at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the R.C.P. (B), January 19th 1925, "Works", Vol. 7, p.14.

concerned, to varying degrees, with the organisation of collective measures to combat or forestall some act of aggression. The Soviet approach to these meetings was thus an integral part of the policy of collective security; indeed the pattern of the conferences which met in these six years reflects the fate of this policy.

The three main characteristics of Soviet attitudes and policy towards international conferences in these six years show a high degree of consistency with the period 1917-1933. The first, the fear of isolation, played an important part throughout the period. The negotiations preceding the Four Power Pact threatened Moscow with total exclusion from the affairs of Europe at a time when the USSR's international position was far from secure. Litvinov had suggested to Dirksen that, though the Soviet Union was not involved in the Pact, it might be possible for the Soviet Government to participate in the role of observer. Dirksen commented upon the Soviet attitude with some insight:

This formulation embodies most clearly the policy that the Soviet Government takes with respect to all international institutions, groupings, and conferences - be it the Kellogg Pact, the World Economic Conference, the European or Disarmament Conference. To be sure, it wishes to be invited warmly to participate, but it wishes to confine itself only to the role of observer, which assumes no obligations, but reserves the right of unrestricted criticism.

In this "struggle to be present" (Kampf ums Dabeisein) aside from the mistrust and the inclination not to be committed, the need for prestige also plays a part....

The position taken by M. Litvinov corresponds also, in the last analysis, to the geopolitical situation of Russia and the foreign policy pursued by her from time to time immemorial. Russia has always sought political ties with West European Powers, has then become involved in luckless wars, in disadvantageous conferences and has then for a longer period turned her back on the West in annoyance, disappointment, and mistrust.⁴

⁴ DGFP, Series C, Vol.1, No.136, p.245. Dirksen to the Foreign Ministry, April 4th 1933.

This instinctive Russian desire for participation, with or without commitment, seems to be another facet of the Soviet conviction that all diplomatic activity excluding the USSR was the prelude to some form of armed interventions. Litvinov himself once stated that the Narkomindel made its judgements according to the formula "without us - means against us."⁵ Payart, the French Chargé in Moscow and an experienced observer of the Soviet Union, diagnosed one of the causes of this Soviet attitude:

In spite of appearances, the Government of the USSR suffers, if not in the economic sphere, at least in the sphere of international politics, from a certain inferiority complex which sometimes makes it liable to reactions of irritation.⁶

It was then, a constant preoccupation with its own prestige and fear of isolation which coloured Moscow's approach not only to the Four Power Pact but to its exclusion from other international gatherings. Soviet membership of the League did not alter this sensitivity, which was again apparent during the Stresa Conference. The invitation to participate in the Non-Intervention Committee was accepted for reasons as much connected with Moscow's desire not to be left out, as to a regard for the Committee's aims. Similarly the USSR remained a member of the Committee, even though it had long lost any pretensions of effectiveness, because to withdraw might precipitate a Four Power settlement of the Spanish crisis without the participation of the Soviet Union.

After the failure of the Brussels Conference, the exclusion of the USSR from the affairs of Europe became a reality.

⁵ DVP, Vol.XVI, No.115, pp.226-227. Telegram from the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs USSR to the Polpred USSR in France, Dovgalevsky, April 11th 1933.

⁶ DDF, 2e Serie, Vol.III, No.156. Payart to Delbos, August 17th 1936.

Moscow's first unsuccessful proposal of an international conference followed the Anschluss. This was repeated on three more occasions before the Munich Agreement confirmed the reluctance of London and Paris to include Russia in any discussion of the European situation. The Anglo-French rejection of Moscow's final proposal for the assembly of an international conference did not prevent the tripartite negotiations of the summer of 1939 from taking place. It was, however, only the most recent of a series of precedents giving Stalin sound reasons to believe that at this stage, an arrangement with Germany might be ultimately more profitable than an alliance with Britain and France.

The second main characteristic of Soviet Conference Diplomacy was the desire to make the maximum amount of propaganda capital from any international gathering or organisation. This aspect had been one of the most significant features of Soviet diplomacy⁷ since the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. The League of Nations proved an ideal platform from which Litvinov could deliver his eloquent pleas for collective security, disarmament and the indivisibility of peace, and since the League took no action, his words were never put to the test. International conferences also provided Moscow with opportunities to display its supposed moral superiority over its fellow negotiations. At Montreux and Nyon, Soviet propaganda had been accompanied by achievements of some significance. At the Non- Intervention Committee and at Brussels, Moscow earned a certain prestige among sympathisers abroad and those critical of the policies of Britain and France. This belief in Soviet moral integrity was strengthened by

⁷ See, E.H.Carr, "The Soviet Impact on the Western World", (New York, 1947), p.69.

Moscow's public posture during the events of March 1938 - March 1939. But in the final analysis, the propaganda success which the Soviet Union enjoyed as a result of this series of conferences only united certain sections of opinion abroad, and to some extent clouded the issue for later generations. It had no significant positive effect on the Governments of Britain or France, and indeed, it strengthened their conviction that Soviet intentions were not sincere. As Nicolson states, "Diplomacy...is not the art of argument, it is the art of persuasion". The introduction of propaganda into an international conference concentrates attention "not so much upon the issues involved, as upon the dramatic but irrelevant problem as to who scores off whom, or who displays the greatest mastery in abuse and dialectic."⁸

Thirdly, an aspect of Soviet Conference Diplomacy which made its appearance, principally at Montreux, was Russian inflexibility in negotiation. The Soviet delegation felt confident enough in the support of the French and Roumanians, to make concessions on only minor points while forcing Britain to make the major sacrifices. The Montreux Conference was the only occasion on which the Soviet Union enjoyed such backing. At Nyon, Litvinov found himself faced by the opposition of the smaller Powers and was forced to retreat. This pattern was reproduced throughout the life of the Non-Intervention Committee, where Maisky or Kagan took stands on various points, but in face of German and Italian opposition, Soviet intransigence was always subordinated to the desire to avoid the collapse of the Committee. The stubbornness of Soviet

⁸ H.Nicolson, "The Old Diplomacy and the New", Annual Lecture at the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies, (Cardiff, 1961), p.1.

negotiators displayed at Montreux was soon to become almost proverbial. The British Government had a foretaste of this in the summer of 1939.⁹

Conference Diplomacy was, during the period 1933-1939, undeniably a superficial aspect of international politics, and one which often confused form and substance. Apart from the Conferences of Montreux and Nyon, which dealt with specific and limited problems, international conferences and committees were not the panacea Allied statesmen had once thought them to be. The successes of Montreux and Nyon were, for the USSR, far outweighed in their significance by the failure at Brussels, the prolonged débâcle of the Non-Intervention Conference, the Munich Agreement and the rejection of the Soviet proposals of 1938-1939. In many ways Conference Diplomacy as such, like the League of Nations, was already doomed to failure by 1933, and it is difficult to find evidence in the succeeding six years, that any government, that of the Soviet Union included, was prepared to risk vital national interests in the cause of international cooperation. Soviet participation was, in general, as much motivated by reasons of prestige and the opportunity to make propaganda, as by the desire to reach agreement. The Soviet Government had developed the enviable facility of seeing any successful conference as the result of its labours, and any failure as that of the schemes of its enemies. In this Moscow was unintentionally aided by the policies pursued by Britain and France, and the profound mistrust felt by these Governments towards the Soviet Union.

⁹ See, DBFP, Series 3, Vol.VI, No.376. Strang to Sargent, July 20th 1939. See also, G.A.Craig, "Techniques of Negotiation", in I.J.Lederer, "Russian Foreign Policy", (Yale, 1962), pp.36 1-36 7. R.Dennett and J.E.Johnson, eds., "Negotiating with the Russians", (New York 1951).

In the six years during which the USSR espoused a policy based principally on collective security, Moscow's experience in the field of Conference Diplomacy, with the exceptions of Montreux and Nyon, conformed to Litvinov's description at the opening of the Brussels Conference on November 4th 1937:

The experience I have in mind teaches us that international conferences, committees and other organisations, which are called upon to serve a particular end, sometimes are inclined, particularly in the event of a protracted existence, to forget their direct purpose and technical part they have to play, and begin to live their own life, with their own peculiar interests. They begin to concern themselves principally with the maintenance of their own existence, with the procuring of moral satisfaction for those who have initiated such conferences, and with their own superficial successes, which do not always coincide with successes for the cause on account of which the conferences were brought into existence.¹⁰

¹⁰ Degras, Vol.III, pp.263-264.

APPENDICES

Article 1.

The High Contracting Parties agree to recognise and declare the principle of freedom of transit and of navigation by sea and by air in the Strait of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora and the Bosphorus, hereinafter comprised under the general term of the "Straits."

Article 2.

The transit and navigation of commercial vessels and aircraft, and of war vessels and aircraft in the Straits in time of peace and in time of war shall henceforth be regulated by the provisions of the attached Annex.

Annex 2.

Warships, including Fleet Auxiliaries, Troopships, Aircraft Carriers and Military Aircraft.

(a) In Time of Peace.

Complete freedom of passage by day and by night under any flag, without any formalities, or tax, or charge whatever, but subject to the following restrictions as to the total force:

The maximum force which any one Power may send through the Straits into the Black Sea is not to be greater than that of the most powerful fleet of the littoral Powers of the Black Sea existing in that sea at the time of passage; but with the proviso that the Powers reserve to themselves the right to send into the Black Sea, at all times and under all circumstances, a force of not more than three ships, of which no individual ship shall exceed 10,000 tons.

Turkey has no responsibility in regard to the number of war vessels which pass through the Straits.

In order to enable the above rule to be observed, the Straits Commission provided for in Article 10 will, on the 1st January and the 1st July of each year, enquire of each Black Sea littoral Power the number of each of the following classes of vessel which such Power possesses in the Black Sea: Battle-ships, battle-cruisers, aircraft-carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, or other types of vessels as well as naval aircraft; distinguishing between the ships which are in active commission and the ships with reduced complements, the ships in reserve and the ships undergoing repairs or alterations.

The Straits Commission will then inform the Powers concerned that the strongest naval force in the Black Sea comprises: Battle-ships, battle-cruisers, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, aircraft and units of other types which may exist. The Straits Commission will also immediately inform the Powers concerned when, owing to the passage into or out of the Black Sea of any ship of the strongest Black Sea force, any alteration in the force has taken place.

The naval force that may be sent through the Straits into the Black Sea will be calculated on the number and type of the ships of war in active commission only.

(b) In Time of War, Turkey being Neutral.

Complete freedom of passage by day and by night under any flag, without any formalities, or tax, or charge whatever, under the same limitations as in paragraph 2 (a).

However, these limitations will not be applicable to any belligerent Power to the prejudice of its belligerent rights in the Black Sea.

The rights and duties of Turkey as a neutral Power cannot authorise her to take any measures liable to interfere with navigation through the Straits, the waters of which, and the air above which, must remain entirely free in time of war, Turkey being neutral, just as in time of peace.

Warships and military aircraft of belligerents will be forbidden to make any capture, to exercise the right of visit and search, or to carry out any other hostile act in the Straits.

As regards revictualling and carrying out repairs, war vessels will be subject to the terms of the Thirteenth Hague Convention of 1907, dealing with maritime neutrality.

Military aircraft will receive in the Straits similar treatment to that accorded under the Thirteenth Hague Convention of 1907 to warships, pending the conclusion of an international Convention establishing the rules of neutrality for aircraft.

(c) In Time of War, Turkey being Belligerent.

Complete freedom of passage for neutral warships, without any formalities, or tax, or charge whatever, but under the same limitations as in paragraph 2(a).

The measures taken by Turkey to prevent enemy ships and aircraft from using the Straits are not to be of such a nature as to prevent the free passage of neutral ships and aircraft, and Turkey agrees to provide the said ships and aircraft with either the necessary instructions or pilots for the above purpose.

Neutral military aircraft will make the passage of the Straits at their own risk and peril, and will submit to investigation as to their character. For this purpose aircraft are to alight on the ground or on the sea in such areas as are specified and prepared for this purpose by Turkey.

3.

(a) The passage of the Straits by submarines of Powers at peace with Turkey must be made on the surface.

(b) The officer in command of a foreign naval force, whether coming from the Mediterranean or the Black Sea, will communicate, without being compelled to stop, to a signal station at the entrance to the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus, the number and the names of vessels under his orders which are entering the Straits.

These signal stations shall be notified from time to time by Turkey; until such signal stations are notified, the freedom

of passage for foreign war vessels in the Straits shall not thereby be prejudiced, nor shall their entry into the Straits be for this reason delayed.

(c) The right of military and non-military aircraft to fly over the Straits, under the conditions laid down in the present rules, necessitates for aircraft:

- (i) Freedom to fly over a strip of territory of five kilometres on each side of the narrow parts of the Straits;
- (ii) Liberty, in the event of a forced landing, to alight on the coast or on the sea in the territorial waters of Turkey.

4.

Limitation of Time of Transit for Warships.

In no event shall warships in transit through the Straits, except in the event of damage or peril of the sea, remain therein beyond the time which is necessary for them to effect their passage, including the time of anchorage during the night if necessary for safety of navigation.

5.

Stay in the Ports of the Straits and of the Black Sea.

(a) Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of this Annex apply to the passage of vessels, warships and aircraft through and over the Straits and do not affect the right of Turkey to make such regulations as she may consider necessary regarding the number of men-of-war and military aircraft of any one Power which may visit Turkish ports or aerodromes at one time, and the duration of their stay.

(b) Littoral Powers of the Black Sea will also have a similar right as regards their ports and aerodromes.

(c) The light-vessels which the Powers at present represented on the European Commission of the Danube maintain as stationnaires at the mouths of that river as far up as Galatz will be regarded as additional to the men-of-war referred to in paragraph 2, and may be replaced in case of need.

6.

Special Provisions relating to Sanitary Protection.

Warships which have on board cases of plague, cholera or typhus, or which have had such cases on board during the last seven days, and warships which have left an infected port within less than five times 24 hours must pass through the Straits in quarantine and apply by the means on board such prophylactic measures as are necessary to prevent any possibility of the Straits being infected.

The same rule shall apply to merchant ships having a doctor on board and passing straight through the Straits without calling at a port or breaking bulk.

Merchant ships not having a doctor on board shall be obliged to comply with the international sanitary regulations before entering the Straits, even if they are not to call at a port therein.

Warships and merchant vessels calling at one of the ports in the Straits shall be subject in that port to the international sanitary regulations applicable in the port in question.

Article 3.

With a view to maintaining the Straits free from any obstacle to free passage and navigation, the provisions contained in Articles 4 to 9 will be applied to the waters and shores thereof as well as to the islands situated therein, or in the vicinity.

Article 4.

The zones and islands indicated below shall be demilitarised:

(1) Both shores of the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorous over the extent of the zones delimited below:

Dardanelles:

On the north-west, the Gallipoli Peninsula and the area south-east of a line traced from a point on the Gulf of Keros 4 kilometres north-east of Bakla-Burnu, reaching the Sea of Marmora at Kumbaghi and passing south of Kavak (this village excluded);

On the south-east, the area included between the coast and a line 20 kilometres from the coast, starting from Cape Eski-Stamboul opposite Tenedos and reaching the Sea of Marmora at a point on the coast immediately north of Karabigha.

Bosphorus (without prejudice to the special provisions relating to Constantinople contained in Article 8):

On the east, the area extending up to a line 15 kilometres from the eastern shore of the Bosphorus;

On the west, the area up to a line 15 kilometres from the western shore of the Bosphorus.

(2) All the islands in the Sea of Marmora; with the exception of the island of Emir Ali Adasi.

(3) In the Aegean Sea, the islands of Samothrace, Lemnos, Imbros, Tenedos and Rabbit Islands.

Article 5.

A Commission composed of four representatives appointed respectively by the Governments of France, Great Britain, Italy and Turkey shall meet within 15 days of the coming into force of the present Convention to determine on the spot the boundaries of the zone laid down in Article 4 (1).

The Governments represented on that Commission will pay the salaries of their respective representatives.

Any general expenses incurred by the Commission shall be borne in equal shares by the Powers represented thereon.

Article 6.

Subject to the provisions of Article 8 concerning Constantinople, there shall exist, in the demilitarised zones and islands, no fortifications, no permanent artillery organisation, no submarine engines of war other than submarine vessels, no military aerial organisation, and no naval base.

No armed forces shall be stationed in the demilitarised zones and islands except the police and gendarmerie forces necessary for the maintenance of order; the armament of such

forces will be composed only of revolvers, swords, rifles and four Lewis guns per hundred men, and will exclude any artillery.

In the territorial waters of the demilitarised zones and islands, there shall exist no submarine engines of war other than submarine vessels.

Notwithstanding the preceding paragraphs Turkey will retain the right to transport her armed forces through the demilitarised zones and islands of Turkish territory, as well as through their territorial waters, where the Turkish fleet will have the right to anchor.

Moreover, in so far as the Straits are concerned, the Turkish Government shall have the right to observe by means of aeroplanes or balloons both the surface and the bottom of the sea. Turkish aeroplanes will always be able to fly over the waters of the Straits and the demilitarised zones of Turkish territory, and will have full freedom to alight therein, either on land or on sea.

In the demilitarised zones and islands and in their territorial waters, Turkey and Greece shall similarly be entitled to effect such movements of personnel as are rendered necessary for the instruction outside these zones and islands of the men recruited therein.

Turkey and Greece shall have the right to organise in the said zones and islands in their respective territories any system of observation and communication, both telegraphic, telephonic and visual. Greece shall be entitled to send her fleet into the territorial waters of the demilitarised Greek islands, but may not use these waters as a base of operations against Turkey nor for any military or naval concentration for this purpose.

Article 7.

No submarine engines of war other than submarine vessels shall be installed in the waters of the Sea of Marmora.

The Turkish Government shall not install any permanent battery or torpedo tubes, capable of interfering with the passage of the Straits, in the coastal zone of the European shore of the Sea of Marmora or in the coastal zone on the Anatolian shore situated to the east of the demilitarised zone of the Bosphorus as far as Darije.

Article 8.

At Constantinople, including for this purpose Stamboul, Pera, Galata, Scutari, as well as Princes' Islands, and in the immediate neighbourhood of Constantinople, there may be maintained for the requirements of the capital, a garrison with a maximum strength of 12,000 men. An arsenal and naval base may also be maintained at Constantinople.

Article 9.

If, in case of war, Turkey or Greece, in pursuance of their belligerent rights, should modify in any way the provisions of demilitarisation prescribed above, they will be bound to re-establish as soon as peace is concluded the régime laid down in the present Convention.

Article 10.

There shall be constituted at Constantinople an International Commission composed in accordance with Article 12 and called the "Straits Commission."

Article 11.

The Commission will exercise its functions over the waters of the Straits.

Article 12.

The Commission shall be composed of a representative of Turkey, who shall be President, and representatives of France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Greece, Roumania, Russia, and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, in so far as these Powers are signatories of the present Convention, each of these Powers being entitled to representation as from its ratification of the said Convention.

The United States of America, in the event of their acceding to the present Convention, will also be entitled to have one representative on the Commission.

Under the same conditions any independent littoral States of the Black Sea which are not mentioned in the first paragraph of the present Article will possess the same right.

Article 13.

The Governments represented on the Commission will pay the salaries of their representatives. Any incidental expenditure incurred by the Commission will be borne by the said Governments in the proportion laid down for the division of the expenses of the League of Nations.

Article 14.

It will be the duty of the Commission to see that the provisions relating to the passage of warships and military aircraft are carried out; these provisions are laid down in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the Annex to Article 2.

Article 15.

The Straits Commission will carry out its functions under the auspices of the League of Nations, and will address to the League an annual report giving an account of its activities, and furnishing all information which may be useful in the interests of commerce and navigation; with this object in view the Commission will place itself in touch with the departments of the Turkish Government dealing with navigation through the Straits.

Article 16.

It will be the duty of the Commission to prescribe such regulations as may be necessary for the accomplishment of its task.

Article 17.

The terms of the present Convention will not infringe the right of Turkey to move her fleet freely in Turkish waters.

Article 18.

The High Contracting Parties, desiring to secure that the demilitarisation of the Straits and of the contiguous zones shall not constitute an unjustifiable danger to the military security of Turkey, and that no act of war should imperil the freedom of the Straits or the safety of the demilitarised zones, agree as follows:

Should the freedom of navigation of the Straits or the security of the demilitarised zones be imperilled by a violation of the provisions relating to freedom of passage, or by a surprise attack or some act of war or threat of war, the High Contracting Parties, and in any case France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan, acting in conjunction, will meet such violation, attack, or other act of war or threat of war, by all means that the Council of the League of Nations may decide for this purpose.

So soon as the circumstances which may have necessitated the action provided for in the preceding paragraph shall have ended, the régime of the Straits as laid down by the terms of the present Convention shall again be strictly applied.

The present provision, which forms an integral part of those relating to the demilitarisation and to the freedom of the Straits, does not prejudice the rights and obligations of the High Contracting Parties under the Covenant of the League of Nations.

Article 19.

The High Contracting Parties will use every possible endeavour to induce non-signatory Powers to accede to the present Convention.

This adherence will be notified through the diplomatic channel to the Government of the French Republic, and by that Government to all signatory or adhering States. The adherence will take effect as from the date of notification to the French Government.

Article 20.

The present Convention shall be ratified. The ratification shall be deposited at Paris as soon as possible.

The Convention will come into force in the same way as the Treaty of Peace signed this day. In so far as concerns those Powers who are not signatories of this Treaty and who at that date shall not yet have ratified the present Convention, this Convention will come into force as from the date on which they deposit their respective ratifications, which deposit shall be notified to the other Contracting Powers by the French Government.

In faith whereof the above-named Plenipotentiaries have signed the present Convention.

Done at Lausanne the 24th July, 1923, in a single copy which will remain deposited in the archives of the Government of the French Republic, and of which authenticated copies will be transmitted to each of the Contracting Powers.

Signatures.

A. Italian draft
of March 4th 1933

No Preamble

F. Final draft
of June 7th 1933

The President of the French Republic, the President of the German Reich, His Majesty the King of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas, Emperor of India, and His Majesty the King of Italy;

Conscious of the special responsibilities incumbent upon them as possessing permanent representation on the Council of the League of Nations, where the League itself and its members are concerned, and of the responsibilities resulting from their common signature of the Locarno agreements;

Convinced that the state of disquiet which obtains throughout the world can only be dissipated by reinforcing their solidarity in such a way as to strengthen confidence in peace in Europe;

Faithful to the obligations which they assumed in virtue of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Locarno Treaties, and the Briand-Kellogg Pact, and taking into account the Declaration of the Renunciation of Force, the principle of which was proclaimed in the declaration signed at Geneva on the 11th December 1932, by their delegates at the Disarmament Conference and adopted on 2nd March 1933, by the Political Commission of that Conference;

Anxious to give full effect to all the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations, while conforming to the methods and procedures laid down therein, from which they have no intention of parting;

Mindful of the rights of

every State, which cannot be affected without the consent of the interested party;

Have resolved to conclude an agreement with these objects, and have appointed as their pleni-potentiaries;

.

Who, having exchanged their full powers, found in good and due form, have agreed as follows:

Article One

The four Western Powers; Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain - undertake to carry out between themselves an effective policy of cooperation with a view to the maintenance of the peace in the spirit of the Kellogg Pact and the "No-Force-Pact", and they undertake to act in the sphere of European relations in such a way that this peace policy, if necessary, is adopted by the others.

The High Contracting Parties will consult together as regards all questions which appertain to them. They undertake to make every effort to pursue within the framework of the League of Nations, a policy of effective cooperation between all Powers with a view to the maintenance of peace.

Article Two

The Four Powers re-affirm in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant of the League of Nations the principle of revision of the Peace Treaties given the existence of conditions which might lead to a conflict between the states. They declare, however, that this principle of revision can be applied only within the framework of the League of Nations and in the spirit of mutual understanding and solidarity of reciprocal interests.

In respect of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and particularly of Articles X, XVI and XIX, the High Contracting Parties decide to examine between themselves and without prejudice to decisions which can only be taken by the regular organs of the League of Nations, all proposals relating to methods and procedures calculated to give due effect to those Articles.

Article Three

Italy, France and Great Britain declare that, in case the Disarmament Conference should lead to partial results only, the equality of rights conceded to Germany must have an effective application, and Germany undertakes to implement this equality of rights by stages which shall be the result of successive agreements to be concluded among the four Powers through normal diplomatic channels.

The four Powers undertake to conclude similar agreements with regard to "equality" for Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria.

The High Contracting Parties undertake to make every effort to ensure the success of the Disarmament Conference and, should questions which particularly concern them, remain in suspense on the conclusion of that Conference, they reserve the right to reexamine these questions between themselves with a view to ensuring their solution through appropriate channels.

Article Four

The four Powers undertake to adopt as much as this is possible, a common line of conduct in all political and non-political, European and extra-European questions as well as with regard to the sphere of colonies.

The High Contracting Parties affirm their desire to consult together as regards all economic questions which have a common interest for Europe and particularly for its economic restoration, with a view to seeking within the framework a settlement of the League of Nations.

Article Five

This agreement of understanding and cooperation will, if necessary, be submitted for approval to the Parliaments; its duration shall be for ten years and it shall tacitly be regarded as renewed for the same period of time, unless it is denounced by one of the parties one year before it expires.

The present agreement is concluded for a period of ten years reckoned from the exchange of ratifications. If at the end of the eighth year none of the High Contracting Parties has notified the others of its intention to terminate it, it shall be considered as renewed and shall remain in force indefinitely, the Contracting Parties retaining the right to terminate it by denouncing it two years in advance.

Article Six

The present pact shall be registered at the Secretariat of the League of Nations.

The present agreement, drawn up in English, French, German and Italian, of which the French text prevails in case of divergence, shall be ratified and the ratifications shall be deposited at Rome as soon as possible. The Government of the Kingdom of Italy will deliver to each of the High Contracting Parties a certified copy of the procès-verbaux of deposit. The present agreement will enter into force as soon as all the ratifications have been deposited.

It shall be registered at the League of Nations in conformity with the Covenant of the League.

Done at Rome, the 7th June 1933, in a single copy, which will remain deposited in the archives of the Kingdom of Italy, certified copies will be delivered to each of the High Contracting Parties.

In faith of the above mentioned the following plenipotentiaries have signed the present agreement:

Henry de Jouvenel
Ulrich von Hassell
Ronald Graham
Benito Mussolini

(a) Joint Resolution of the Stresa Conference, April 14th 1935.

The Representatives of the Governments of Italy, France, and the United Kingdom have examined at Stresa the general European situation in the light of the results of the exchanges of views which have taken place in recent weeks, of the decision taken on March 16th by the German Government, and of the information obtained by British Ministers during the visits recently paid by them to several European capitals. Having considered the bearing of this situation on the policy defined in the arrangements reached respectively in Rome and in London, they found themselves in complete agreement on the various matters discussed.

1. They agreed upon a common line of conduct to be pursued in the course of the discussion of the request presented to the Council of the League of Nations by the French Government.

2. The information which they have received has confirmed their view that the negotiations should be pursued for the development which is desired in security in Eastern Europe.

3. The Representatives of the three Governments examined afresh the Austrian situation.

They confirmed the Anglo-Franco-Italian declarations of February 17th and September 27th 1934, in which the three Governments recognized that the necessity of maintaining the independence and integrity of Austria would continue to inspire their common policy.

Referring to the Franco-Italian protocol of January 7th 1935, and to the Anglo-French declarations of February 3rd 1935, in which the decision was reaffirmed to consult together as to the measures to be taken in the case of threats to the integrity and independence of Austria, they agreed to recommend that representatives of all the Governments enumerated in the protocol of Rome should meet at a very early date with a view to concluding the Central European agreement.

4. As regards the proposed Air Pact for Western Europe, the Representatives of the three Governments confirmed the principles and procedure that should be followed as envisaged in the London communiqué of February 3rd, and agreed to continue actively the study of the question with a view to the drafting of a pact between the five Powers mentioned in the London communiqué and of any bilateral agreements which might accompany it.

5. In approaching the problem of armaments, the Representatives of the three Powers recalled that the London Communiqué envisaged an agreement to be freely negotiated with Germany to take the place of the relevant clauses of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles, and took into careful and anxious consideration the recent action of the German Government and the report furnished by Sir John Simon of his conversations with the German Chancellor on this subject.

It was regretfully recognized that the method of unilateral repudiation adopted by the German Government, at a moment when steps were being taken to promote a freely-negotiated settlement of the question of armaments, had undermined public confidence in the security of a peaceful order. Moreover, the magnitude of the declared programme of German rearmament, already well in process of execution, had invalidated the

quantitative assumptions upon which efforts for disarmament had hitherto been based and shaken the hopes by which those efforts were inspired.

The Representatives of the three Powers, nevertheless, reaffirm their earnest desire to sustain peace by establishing a sense of security, and declare for themselves that they remain anxious to join in every practicable effort for promoting international agreement on the limitation of armaments.

6. The representatives of the three Governments took into consideration the desire expressed by the States, whose military status was respectively determined by the Treaties of Saint-Germain, Trianon, and Neuilly, to obtain the revision of this status.

They decided that the other States concerned should be informed of this desire through the diplomatic channel.

They agreed to recommend the other States concerned to examine this question with a view to its settlement by mutual agreement within the framework of general and regional guarantees of security.

(b) Anglo-Italian Declaration, April 14th 1935.

The following joint Declaration was made by the Representatives of Italy and the United Kingdom in reference to the Treaty of Locarno:

The Representatives of Italy and of the United Kingdom, the Powers which participate in the Treaty of Locarno only in the capacity of guarantors, formally reaffirm all their obligations under that Treaty, and declare their intention, should the need arise, faithfully to fulfil them.

Inasmuch as the two Powers have entered into these obligations in relation to all the other parties to the Treaty of Locarno, this joint Declaration, which has been made at the Stresa Conference in which France is participating, will also be formally communicated to the Governments of Germany and Belgium.

(c) Final Declaration of the Stresa Conference, April 14th 1935.

The three Powers, the object of whose policy is the collective maintenance of peace within the framework of the League of Nations, find themselves in complete agreement in opposing, by all practicable means, any unilateral repudiation of treaties which may endanger the peace of Europe, and will act in close and cordial collaboration for this purpose.

Section II. Vessels of War

Article 8.

For the purposes of the present Convention, the definitions of vessels of war and of their specification together with those relating to the calculation of tonnage shall be as set forth in Annex II to the present Convention.

Article 9.

Naval auxiliary vessels specifically designed for the carriage of fuel, liquid or non-liquid, shall not be subject to the provisions of Article 13 regarding notification, nor shall they be counted for the purpose of calculating the tonnage which is subject to limitation under Articles 14 and 18, on condition that they shall pass through the Straits singly. They shall, however, continue to be on the same footing as vessels of war for the purpose of the remaining provisions governing transit.

The auxiliary vessels specified in the preceding paragraph shall only be entitled to benefit by the exceptional status therein contemplated if their armament does not include: for use against floating targets, more than two guns of a maximum calibre of 105 millimetres; for use against aerial targets, more than two guns of a maximum calibre of 75 millimetres.

Article 10.

In time of peace, light surface vessels, minor war vessels, and auxiliary vessels, whether belonging to Black Sea or non-Black Sea Powers, and whatever their flag, shall enjoy freedom of transit through the Straits without any taxes or charges whatever, provided that such transit is begun during daylight and subject to the conditions laid down in Article 13 and the articles following thereafter.

Vessels of war other than those which fall within the categories specified in the preceding paragraph shall only enjoy a right of transit under the special conditions provided by the Articles 11 and 12.

Article 11.

Black Sea Powers may send through the Straits capital ships of a tonnage greater than that laid down in the first paragraph of Article 14, on condition that these vessels pass through the Straits singly, escorted by not more than two destroyers.

Article 12.

Black Sea Powers shall have the right to send through the Straits, for the purpose of rejoining their base, submarines constructed or purchased outside the Black Sea, provided that adequate notice of the laying down or purchase of such submarines shall have been given to Turkey.

Submarines belonging to the said Powers shall also be entitled to pass through the Straits to be repaired in dockyards

outside the Black Sea on condition that detailed information on the matter is given to Turkey.

In either case, the said submarines must travel by day and on the surface, and must pass through the Straits singly.

Article 13.

The transit of vessels of war through the Straits shall be preceded by a notification given to the Turkish Government through the diplomatic channel. The normal period of notice shall be eight days; but it is desirable that in the case of non-Black Sea Powers this period should be increased to fifteen days. The notification shall specify the destination, name, type, and number of the vessels, as also the date of entry for the outward passage and, if necessary, for the return journey. Any change of date shall be subject to three days' notice.

Entry into the Straits for the outward passage shall take place within a period of five days from the date given in the original notification. After the expiry of this period, a new notification shall be given under the same conditions as for the original notification.

When effecting transit, the commander of the naval force shall, without being under any obligation to stop, communicate to a signal station at the entrance to the Dardanelles or the Bosphorus the exact composition of the force under his orders.

Article 14.

The maximum aggregate tonnage of all foreign naval forces which may be in course of transit through the Straits shall not exceed 15,000 tons, except in the cases provided for in Article 11 and in Annex III to the present Convention.

The forces specified in the preceding paragraph shall not, however, comprise more than nine vessels.

Vessels, whether belonging to Black Sea or non-Black Sea Powers, paying visits to a port in the Straits, in accordance with the provisions of Article 17, shall not be included in this tonnage.

Neither shall vessels of war which have suffered damage during their passage through the Straits be included in this tonnage; such vessels, while undergoing repair, shall be subject to any special provisions relating to security laid down by Turkey.

Article 15

Vessels of war in transit through the Straits shall in no circumstances make use of any aircraft which they may be carrying.

Article 16

Vessels of war in transit through the Straits shall not, except in the event of damage or peril of the sea, remain therein longer than is necessary for them to effect the passage.

Article 17

Nothing in the provisions of the preceding articles shall prevent a naval force of any tonnage or composition from paying

a courtesy visit of limited duration to a port in the Straits, at the invitation of the Turkish Government. Any such force must leave the Straits by the same route as that by which it entered, unless it fulfils the conditions required for passage in transit through the Straits as laid down by Articles 10, 14 and 18.

Article 18.

(1) The aggregate tonnage which non-Black Sea Powers may have in that sea in time of peace shall be limited as follows:

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) below, the aggregate tonnage of the said Powers shall not exceed 30,000 tons;

(b) If at any time the tonnage of the strongest fleet in the Black Sea shall exceed by at least 10,000 tons the tonnage of the strongest fleet in that sea at the date of the signature of the present Convention the aggregate tonnage of 30,000 tons mentioned in paragraph (a) shall be increased by the same amount, up to a maximum of 45,000 tons. For this purpose, each Black Sea Power shall, in conformity with Annex IV to the present Convention, inform the Turkish Government, on January 1st and July 1st of each year, of the total tonnage of its fleet in the Black Sea; and the Turkish Government shall transmit this information to the other High Contracting Parties and to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations.

(c) The tonnage which any one non-Black Sea Power may have in the Black Sea shall be limited to two-thirds of the aggregate tonnage provided for in paragraphs (a) and (b) above;

(d) In the event, however, of one or more non-Black Sea Powers desiring to send naval forces into the Black Sea for a humanitarian purpose, the said forces, which shall in no case exceed 8,000 tons altogether, shall be allowed to enter the Black Sea without having to give the notification provided for in Article 13 of the present Convention, provided an authorization is obtained from the Turkish Government in the following circumstances; if the figure of the aggregate tonnage specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) above has not been reached and will not be exceeded by the despatch of the forces which it is desired to send, the Turkish Government shall grant the said authorization within the shortest possible time after receiving the request which has been addressed to it; if the said figure has already been reached or if the despatch of the forces which it is desired to send will cause it to be exceeded, the Turkish Government will immediately inform the other Black Sea Powers of the request for authorization, and if the said Powers make no objection within twenty-four hours of having received this information, the Turkish Government shall, within forty-eight hours at the latest inform the interested Powers of the reply which it has decided to make to their request.

Any further entry into the Black Sea of naval forces of non-Black Sea Powers shall only be effected within the available limits of the aggregate tonnage provided for in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

(2) Vessels of war belonging to non-Black Sea Powers shall not remain in the Black Sea more than twenty-one days, whatever be the object of their presence there.

Article 19

In time of war, Turkey not being belligerent, warships shall enjoy complete freedom of transit and navigation through the Straits under the same conditions as those laid down in Articles 10 to 18.

Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not, however, pass through the Straits except in cases arising out of the application of Article 25 of the present Convention, and in cases of assistance rendered to a State victim of aggression in virtue of a treaty of mutual assistance binding Turkey, concluded within the framework of the Covenant of the League of Nations, and registered and published in accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Covenant.

In the exceptional cases provided for in the preceding paragraph, the limitations laid down in Articles 10 to 18 of the present Convention shall not be applicable.

Notwithstanding the prohibition of passage laid down in paragraph 2 above, vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers, whether they are Black Sea Powers or not, which have become separated from their bases, may return thereto.

Vessels of war belonging to belligerent Powers shall not make any capture, exercise the right of visit and search, or carry out any hostile act in the Straits.

Article 20.

In time of war, Turkey being belligerent, the provisions of Articles 10 to 18 shall not be applicable; the passage of warships shall be left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish Government.

Article 21.

Should Turkey consider herself to be threatened with imminent danger of war she shall have the right to apply the provisions of Article 20 of the present Convention.

Vessels which have passed through the Straits before Turkey has made use of the powers conferred upon her by the preceding paragraph, and which thus find themselves separated from their bases, may return thereto. It is, however, understood that Turkey may deny this right to vessels of war belonging to the State whose attitude has given rise to the application of the present article.

Should the Turkish Government make use of the powers conferred by the first paragraph of the present article, a notification to that effect shall be addressed to the High Contracting Parties and to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations.

If the Council of the League of Nations decide by a majority of two-thirds that the measures thus taken by Turkey are not justified, and if such should also be the opinion of the majority of the High Contracting Parties signatories to the present Convention, the Turkish Government undertakes to discontinue the measures in question as also any measures which may have been taken under Article 6 of the present Convention.

Article 22.

Vessels of war which have on board cases of plague, cholera, yellow fever, exanthematic typhus, or smallpox, or which have had such cases on board within the last seven days, and vessels of war which have left an infected port within less than five times twenty-four hours, must pass through the Straits in quarantine and apply by the means on board such prophylactic measures as are necessary in order to prevent any possibility of the Straits being infected.

Section III. Aircraft

Article 23

In order to assure the passage of civil aircraft between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the Turkish Government will indicate the air routes available for this purpose, outside the forbidden zones which may be established in the Straits. Civil aircraft may use these routes provided that they give the Turkish Government, as regards occasional flights, a notification of three days, and as regards flights on regular services, a general notification of the dates of passage.

The Turkish Government moreover undertake, notwithstanding any remilitarization of the Straits, to furnish the necessary facilities for the safe passage of civil aircraft authorized under the air regulations in force in Turkey to fly across Turkish territory between Europe and Asia. The route which is to be followed in the Straits zone by aircraft which have obtained an authorization shall be indicated from time to time.

Section IV. General Provisions.

Article 24.

The functions of the International Commission set up under the Convention relating to the régime of the Straits of July 24th 1923, are hereby transferred to the Turkish Government.

The Turkish Government undertake to collect statistics and to furnish information concerning the application of Articles 11, 12, 14, and 18 of the present Convention.

They will supervise the execution of all the provisions of the present Convention relating to the passage of vessels of war through the Straits.

As soon as they have been notified of the intended passage through the Straits of a foreign naval force, the Turkish Government shall inform the representatives at Angora of the High Contracting Parties of the composition of that force, its tonnage, the date fixed for its entry into the Straits, and, if necessary, the probable date of its return.

The Turkish Government shall address to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations and to the High Contracting Parties an annual report giving details regarding the movements of foreign vessels of war through the Straits and furnishing all information which may be of service to commerce and navigation, both by sea and by air, for which provision is made in the present Convention.

Nothing in the present Convention shall prejudice the rights and obligations of Turkey, or of any of the other High Contracting Parties Members of the League of Nations, arising out of the Covenant of the League of Nations.

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Annex IV

The categories and sub-categories of vessels to be included in the calculation of the total tonnage of the Black Sea Powers provided for in Article 18 of the present Convention are the following:

Capital Ships:	Aircraft Carriers:	Light Surface Vessels:
sub-category (a).	sub-category (a).	sub-category (a).
sub-category (b).	sub-category (b).	sub-category (b).
		sub-category (c).

Submarines:

as defined in Annex II to the present Convention.

The displacement which is to be taken into consideration in the calculation of the total tonnage is the standard displacement as defined in Annex II. Only those vessels shall be taken into consideration which are not over-age according to the definition contained in the said Annex.

2. The notification provided for in Article 18, paragraph (b) shall also include the total tonnage of vessels belonging to the categories and sub-categories mentioned in paragraph 1 of the present Annex.

3. Protocol

At the moment of signing the Convention bearing this day's date, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries declare for their respective Governments that they accept the following provisions:

(1) Turkey may immediately remilitarize the zone of the Straits as defined in the Preamble to the said Convention.

(2) As from August 15th 1936, the Turkish Government shall provisionally apply the régime specified in the said Convention.

(3) The present Protocol shall enter into force as from this day's date.

Done at Montreux, July 20th 1936.

Signatures.

Appendix No. 5. Final Declaration of the Brussels Conference,
November 24th 1937.

The Nine-Power Treaty is a conspicuous example of numerous international instruments by which the nations of the world enunciate certain principles and accept certain self-denying rules in their conduct with each other, solemnly undertaking to respect the sovereignty of other nations, to refrain from seeking political or economic domination of other nations, and to abstain from interference in their internal affairs.

These international instruments constitute a framework within which international security and international peace are intended to be safeguarded without resort to arms and within which international relationships should subsist on the basis of mutual trust, goodwill, and beneficial trade and financial relations.

It must be recognized that whenever armed force is employed in disregard of these principles, the whole structure of international relations based upon the safeguards provided by treaties is disturbed. Nations are then compelled to seek security in ever-increasing armaments. There is created everywhere a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. The validity of these principles cannot be destroyed by force, their universal applicability cannot be denied, and indispensability to civilization and progress cannot be gainsaid.

It was in accordance with these principles that this Conference was called in Brussels for the purpose, as set forth in the terms of the invitation issued by the Belgian Government "of examining, in conformity with Article 7 of the Nine-Power Treaty, the situation in the Far East and to consider friendly methods for hastening an end of the regrettable conflict now taking place there".

Since its opening session on November 3rd, the Conference has continuously striven to promote conciliation and has endeavoured to secure the co-operation of the Japanese Government in the hope of arresting hostilities and bringing about a settlement.

The Conference is convinced that force by itself can provide no just and lasting solution for disputes between nations. It continues to believe that it would be to the immediate and ultimate interest of both parties to the present dispute to avail themselves of the assistance of others in an effort to bring hostilities to an early end as a necessary preliminary to the achievement of a general and lasting settlement. It further believes that a satisfactory settlement cannot be achieved by direct negotiation between the parties to the conflict alone, and that only by consultation with other Powers principally concerned can there be achieved an agreement, the terms of which will be just, generally acceptable, and likely to endure.

This Conference strongly reaffirms the principles of the Nine-Power Treaty as being among the basic principles which are essential to world peace and orderly progressive development of national and international life.

The Conference believes that a prompt suspension of hostilities in the Far East would be in the best interests not only of China and Japan but of all nations. With each day's continuance of the conflict the loss in lives and property increases and the ultimate solution of the conflict becomes more difficult.

The Conference therefore strongly urges that hostilities be suspended and resort be had to peaceful processes.

The Conference believes that no possible step to bring about, by peaceful processes, a just settlement of the conflict should be overlooked or omitted.

In order to allow time for participating Governments to exchange views and further explore all peaceful methods by which a just settlement of the dispute may be attained consistently with the principles of the Nine-Power Treaty, and in conformity with the objectives of that Treaty, the Conference deems it advisable temporarily to suspend its sittings. The conflict in the Far East remains, however a matter of concern to all the Powers assembled at Brussels - by virtue of commitments in the Nine-Power Treaty or of special interest in the Far East - and especially to those most immediately and directly affected by conditions and events in the Far East. Those of them that are parties to the Nine-Power Treaty have expressly adopted a policy designed to stabilize conditions in the Far East and, to that end, are bound by the provisions of that Treaty, outstanding among which are those of Articles 1 and 7.

The Conference will be called together again whenever its President or any two of its members shall have reported that they consider that its deliberations can be advantageously resumed.

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